

## SPRING 2024 Newsletter



### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Happy Spring!

This year of 2024 has been off to a great start for all of us here in the AWIS San Diego Chapter. We began the year right with our New Year's celebration in February. At this annual event, we invite members to welcome the new year and acknowledge those who have gone above and beyond for our chapter the previous year. This is always a fun event for me as I get to meet a lot of new members and interact with old ones I do not get to see often.

Our Outreach Committee has been busy planning multiple events, bringing the joy of science to our community. At the Expand Your Horizons event, students participated in solving a murder mystery by completing various hands-on science experiments. We also awarded \$1400 to seven middle school and seven high school girls who took part in the Greater San Diego Science and Engineering Fair on March 13.

Our Scholarship Committee has two new co-chairs, Eilen Fonseca and Xingxiu Pan, who have been working hard to revamp the scholarship submission process. We are now in the review stage. I am very excited about this year's pool of applicants and cannot wait to acknowledge our winners.

The process has begun for forming a Women in Science and Technology (WIST) Conference Planning Committee. This event typically takes place biannually but, with the chapter still recovering from the Covid-era, it last took place online in 2021. Our hope is to bring back this event in the Fall of 2025. If you would like to be involved with planning, please reach out to me at [president@awissd.org](mailto:president@awissd.org).

Other ways you can get involved is by joining one (or more!) committees either as a member or co-chair if you are looking to take on a leadership role. You can see posts from our PR Committee on all our social media platforms, highlighting various teams who are looking for new members.

Our board is still looking for individuals to join in the role of secretary and member-at-large. Becoming a board member gives you the opportunity to shape the future of our San Diego Chapter and looks good on your resume

I hope everyone enjoyed the eclipse on April 8!

Best,

Rose

Rose Presby, PhD  
President, AWIS-SD  
[president@awissd.org](mailto:president@awissd.org)

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## Ring in the New Year

By Agnes Antwan

On February 13, 2024, AWIS San Diego hosted its annual New Year Party at The Cork and Craft in in Rancho Bernardo. The new year event gives AWIS-SD members a chance to reconnect after time away for the holidays, meet all new members, and a fun time to ring in the new year together. Members spent the evening socializing and enjoying delicious appetizers and drinks.



The annual AWIS-SD New Year's party. A spacious venue for all to connect and re-connect with other AWIS-SD members (left); all participants gathered for a photo op (right).

Many member volunteers were also recognized for their accomplishments and dedication to AWIS-SD. They include:

**Achievement in Innovation:** Jennifer Swindlehurst Chan

**Rookie of the Year:** Tiffany Naing, Ivy Tam, Carolyn McGrail, Shannon Chan

**Achievement in Outreach or Community Service:** Christine Stephen

**Outstanding Volunteer:** Agnes Antwan

**Leadership Service:** Eulalia Coutinho

**Board Special Award:** Lori Yang

**President's Award:** Jean Spence, Corine Lau

**Long Service Awards:**

30 years: Susan Forsburg

10 years: Yessica Diaz Roman

5 years: Heather Karpel, Soneela Ramesh, Avani Mody

Thank you to our sponsors and partners. If you are interested in more events like this, go to [awissd.org](http://awissd.org) for more information, or contact Agnes from the Events committee at [events@awissd.org](mailto:events@awissd.org).

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## Thriving as a Leader in Challenging Times: A Workshop with Dr. Kerstin Kirchsteiger

By Elena Rubio de la Torre



Being a part of AWIS San Diego isn't just about connecting with women in STEM – it's about empowering yourself to become the best leader you can be.

This March, we hosted [Dr. Kerstin Kirchsteiger](#), an executive coach known for helping leaders navigate even the trickiest situations. Her workshop, **Thriving Through Turbulence: The Resilient Leader**, was packed with actionable strategies to not only survive, but also to thrive during challenging economic times.



Imagine being able to do more with less, excel under pressure, and unlock your peak performance potential. That's exactly what Dr. Kirchsteiger equipped our 30 diverse STEM background attendees to do!

At this informative workshop, we learned the brain science behind sustained high performance, discovered key practices for leading through uncertainty, and even embarked on a journey of self-discovery to identify our personal strengths.

The interactive activities were exciting! We took a quiz to pinpoint areas for growth, from mindset ("thinking bucket") to building strong relationships. (Spoiler alert: setting realistic goals and turning challenges into habits are key!) Personally, I realized that I needed to prioritize reflection and preparation – but it was also great to see areas where I'm already excelling.

One lucky attendee (Hoang Nguyen) won a free coaching session with Dr. Kirchsteiger herself, valued at \$300!

**Ready to join our mission?** Become part of AWIS San Diego and unlock a world of leadership development opportunities specifically designed for women in STEM. We can't wait to welcome you!

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# Inspiring the Next Generation of Scientists and Engineers: Greater San Diego Sciences and Engineering Fair 2024

By Elena Rubio de la Torre



This spring, AWIS San Diego was thrilled to participate in the 70th Greater San Diego Sciences and Engineering Fair.

Our dedicated volunteers spent March 13th judging amazing projects from middle and high school students.

These young scientists impressed us with their in-depth explorations of biology, biomedicine, chemistry, and engineering. From well-defined hypotheses to meticulously documented experiments and clear presentations, their enthusiasm for STEM was truly contagious!



The judges faced a tough task – the quality of the projects was impressive! Out of a talented pool of contestants, AWIS San Diego proudly awarded 14 prizes – seven for middle school and seven for high school students.

Congratulations to all the winners!

Your passion and dedication to science and engineering are an inspiration. We can't wait to see what amazing discoveries you make in the future!

- Princess-Hafsah Aly Saad Aly - Bright Horizon Academy - Advisor: Najwan Naserelddin
- Embry Blais & Ariana Samady - The Rhoades School - Advisor: Roxanne Hunker
- Emily Diep - Connect Academy Poway Unified - Advisor: Janice Teixeira
- Leanne Fan - Westview High School - Advisor: David MacMartin
- Sarah Gao - Canyon Crest Academy - Advisor: Ed Gerstin
- Aarushi Garg - Canyon Crest Academy - Advisor: Ed Gerstin
- Riya Khushu - Francis Parker School - Advisor: John Pierce
- Kaelyn Liu - Canyon Crest Academy - Advisor: Kaveh Shakeri
- Maryam Purmul - Bright Horizon Academy - Advisor: Najwan Naserelddin
- Ella Raspotnik - The Children's School - Advisor: Tina Brown
- Bella Schere - The Children's School - Advisor: Diana Quincannon
- Olympia Sternson - The Rhoades School - Advisor: Roxanne Hunker
- Kayley Xu - The Bishop's School - Advisor: Darren Cameron

- Emily Zhang - Canyon Crest Academy - Advisor: Ed Gerstin

Want to help shape the future of women in STEM fields? Join [Association for Women in Science](#)

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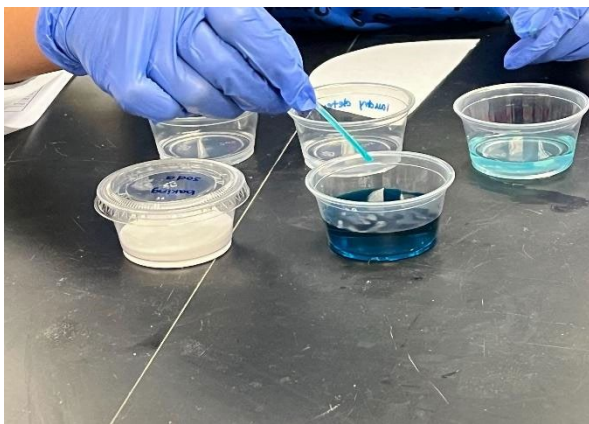
## **Expanding Your Horizons: A Fun Workshop in Search of Future Forensic Scientist**

By Jamillah Murtadha



On March 20, 2023, the AWIS Outreach Committee participated as presenters in the Expanding Your Horizons (EYH) event held at the University of San Diego (USD). The EYH conference registered 200 girls from all over San Diego County to participate in STEM workshop activities. The participants, all middle schoolers, were in groups of roughly ten and joined in one-hour sessions.

**The Crime Scene with the victim, George Mustard, and volunteers. Pictured left to right: Angela Synder, Alyssa Rodriguez, Jamillah Murtadha, Allison White, Ashley Watson, Debbie Ledzma, Siena Quinn, Sedalia Dominguez, Marni Jacobs, Christine Stephen, and Tiffany Naing.**

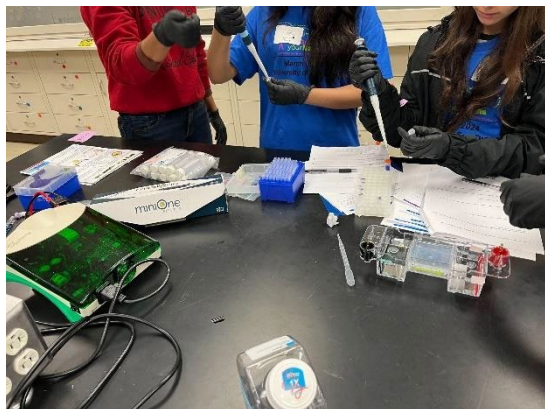


The workshop that AWIS Outreach orchestrated was a Crime Scene Investigation with several stations that gave the girls hands-on experience with DNA analysis, DNA typing, and liquid identification. For each session, the team presented the background information for the crime scene the girls were investigating.

**Pictured above: EYH participants using scientific deductions to identify unknown liquids.**

The background story detailed a victim named George Mustard and three suspects: his sister, brother, and cleaner. The future forensic scientists had to utilize every station to collect the evidence needed to investigate which suspect committed the crime. For the DNA analysis station, it was the first time many participants worked with a pipette. They learned how to apply the

scientific method to identify the three clear, unknown liquids and compare them with the sample at the crime scene. For the blood-typing station, the participants used pipettes to help compare the fake blood at the crime scene with the suspect's blood.



The workshop was a huge success, and many participants said that it was their favorite of the entire EYH event. The Outreach Committee received many impressive questions from the participants as well.

**Pictured above: EYH participants using a pipette to analyze the blood of the suspects.**



The event would not have succeeded without the point leads, Christine Stephen, Angela Snyder, Tiffany Naing, Jamillah Murtadha, and the volunteers: Ashley Watson, Siena Quinn, Sedalia Dominguez, Alyssa Rodriguez, Marni Jacobs, Debbie Ledezma, Allison White, Elena Rubio de la Torre, Corine Lau, Keira Roberts, and Valeria Guglielmi.

**Pictured from left to right: More EYH volunteers and co-leads Angela Snyder, Christine Stephen, Keira Roberts, Corine Lau, Tiffany Naing, Jamillah Murtadha, Elena Rubio de la Torre, and Valeria Guglielmi.**

The Outreach Committee's Crime Scene Investigation workshop was a great success, and we hope our contributions to this event will inspire young girls to pursue careers in STEM.



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## **A2I Coffee Chat with Kim Walker**

By Eulalia Coutinho

The Academia to Industry (A2I) Committee had the pleasure of hosting Kim Walker (MS, RAC (US & EU), FRAPS) on February 8, 2024. Kim is an independent global regulatory, quality, and clinical consultant. This virtual session was packed with tons of helpful information and advice for anyone interested in regulatory affairs (RA).

Kim walked us through her career path, sharing the many different jobs she worked. One of her first steps was learning to write a protocol for a blood bank, which gave her experience in working with the FDA. Becoming familiar with the FDA got her the next job working with clinical systems and quality control at a startup company.

To increase her training, she next decided to get her master's degree in regulatory affairs, which helped her to solidify the knowledge gained from her experience at the startup and helped her to gain confidence in new skills and expertise.

For those interested in regulatory affairs, Kim provided several suggestions depending on where you are in your education or career. If you have a job in life sciences but not directly related to RA, she recommended either volunteering for a RA project or applying for a quality assurance role. One can also interact with the San Diego (<https://www.sdran.org/>) or Orange County RA

communities (<https://ocra-dg.org/>) to become acquainted with both technical terms and processes.

Another option is to get a master's degree like she did at, for example, San Diego State University, which offers a program in regulatory affairs. There is also a regulatory affairs certification (RAC), but one needs two years of related experience in order to take the exam. For those with a PhD, it can be hard to get a RA job at a company without prior experience. As an alternative, Kim suggested working for the FDA as a way to gain experience in RA.

For those who are unsure, here are some reasons why you should consider a career in RA. First and foremost, you will play an active role in helping people get medicines and therapies they need to prevent or treat diseases. You will be helping to develop cutting-edge science and medicines, in addition to helping to design, develop, and monitor clinical trials. Another big positive is that there are a lot of jobs available in RA. Last but not least, it is a lot of fun.

This was an extremely informative coffee chat and on behalf of the A2I Committee, we would like to thank Kim for taking time to talk with us and share her valuable insights and advice about her career in regulatory affairs.



## Member News

- 1) Pam Bhattacharya, former member of the AWIS San Diego Outreach Committee during her time as a postdoctoral scholar at UC San Diego, will be receiving the 2024 "Most Promising Engineer In Industry" award at the BEYA STEM DTX Conference, based on her work as a Principal Data Scientist at the MITRE Corporation. This annual conference offers K-12 students, college students, corporate, government, military professionals, business, and industry employers with opportunities to learn, network, celebrate excellence, and connect with STEM career opportunities. You can find more information about BEYA and this year's award winners at <https://intouch.ccgmag.com/mpage/beya-award-winners>
- 2) Join Cynthia Kosciuczyk to take a deep dive into the ways the pandemic affected us physically, emotionally, and spiritually in her new book, "We Endured: Essays of our Lives During Quarantine".
- 3) Elena Rubio de la Torre, one of our active AWIS-SD members, started her own consulting business in March that empower life sciences companies build and scale customer functions, allowing them to focus on what they do best: their technology. BioCustomer Support Solutions: <http://www.biocustomerss.com>

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## Other STEM News

- 1) Opinion: Women in science and business are making history and global impact. Here's how.  
By Priti Pharkya  
[San Diego Union Tribune, posted March 25, 2024](#)

Classrooms, libraries and organizations in San Diego and across the country have been celebrating Women's History Month throughout March. Posters and displays have been honoring the work and lives of incredible women to note their contributions to society and the world. Having spent my entire career in the biochemical sphere, I, of course, have an abiding affection for the all-stars of women's scientific history.

[Read more](#)

- 2) Increased Use of the Childcare Cost Support Policy by National Research Service Award (NRSA) Fellows in FY 2023

By Mike Lauer

[NIH Extramural Nexus, posted February 6, 2024](#)

Support for families at critical periods is a known reason why some researchers, especially female and underrepresented scientists, leave research careers (see these articles from [Academic Medicine](#) and [FASEB](#)). For this reason, NIH has developed and implemented [family-friendly policies](#) aimed at supporting early-career researchers. One of these policies provides up to \$2,500 in childcare cost support to full-time National Research Service Award (NRSA) fellows and trainees. In 2022, we shared some [preliminary data](#) on how many NRSA fellows requested and

were issued these awards. Today, we are pleased to update these data for individual fellowship awardees.

[Read more](#)

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## Upcoming AWIS-SD Events

Check our [website](#) for the most up-to-date information

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### About the Authors



**Agnes Antwan**, a native San Diegan, is an Associate Scientist at Crinetics Pharmaceuticals. She received her undergraduate degree in Biology from University of California, Riverside and started her career shortly after in the Psychiatry Department at UCSD. During her time at UCSD, working in both the Consortium for Translational Research in Neuropsychopharmacology (CTRIN) and the Markou Consortium for Neurobiology and Psychopharmacology, she investigated psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia, PTSD, addiction, depression, anxiety, and so on. Agnes transitioned from her career in academia into the industry at Crinetics Pharmaceuticals in 2019, which entails researching and developing therapeutics for rare endocrine diseases and endocrine-related tumors. She joined AWIS-SD in 2022 and began her role as an Events Committee Co-Chair and is currently the Chair of the Events Committee. In her free time, Agnes enjoys trying new restaurants and bars, cooking, and lots of traveling!



**Eulalia Coutinho** is a scientist at Crinetics Pharmaceuticals, working on early stage drug discovery. She earned her PhD from SOKENDAI, Japan and then went on to complete two postdoctoral fellowships one at the UC San Diego and the other at University of Otago, New Zealand. She is the new chair of the A2I committee and is looking forward to organizing coffee clubs and events featuring industry professionals in various roles. In her free time, she enjoys biking, hiking, and swing dancing.



**Jamillah Murtadha** grew up in West Virginia, but she has lived in San Diego for seven years. She transferred to UC San Diego as an undergraduate from Southwestern College. She is the first out of ten children to go to graduate school. Currently, she is a Biological Sciences major in the BS/MS program. She enjoys being the Co-chair in the Outreach Department of the Association of Women in Science (AWIS) organization. And she is always striving to seek knowledge outside her field to

become a well-rounded scientist. She believes that it is the duty of scientists to communicate the importance of their research with our society.

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## **Contribute to the Newsletter**

If you are an AWIS-SD member, we encourage you to contribute to the newsletter. Please send articles, photographs, and member news as MS Word attachments to [newsletter@awissd.org](mailto:newsletter@awissd.org). News articles should not exceed 250 words, event summaries should not exceed 500 words, and feature articles (special-interest stories and profiles) should not exceed 1000 words. The submission deadline for the next issue is July 15, 2024.

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## **AWIS San Diego Communications Committee - Newsletter**

Co-chairs: Elaine Guo and Corine Lau

Members: Juliati Rahajeng, Pat Rarus, Chandani Sen, and Jean Spence

[Newsletter@awissd.org](mailto:Newsletter@awissd.org)

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