

# ASU students sweep e-poster awards at AAAS Conference

By Risa Aria Schnebly, ASU News  
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Dozens of students from around the country descended upon downtown Phoenix recently for the [American Association for the Advancement of Science Annual Meeting](#).

There, both undergraduate and graduate students had the chance to present a poster on their research in front of a panel of judges to compete for a \$500 cash prize and the publication of their name and poster title in the journal [Science](#), one of the world's most widely cited scientific journals.

This year, seven ASU students won first place in their respective categories: undergraduates [Emma James](#), [Karah Mayer](#), [Helen Nguyen](#) and [Delaney Witmer](#), and graduate students [Michael Erickson](#), [Tasneem Mohammed](#) and [Becca Tiernan](#). The students' work will be featured in the April edition of Science.

"It feels really good to be recognized for work that I'm really grateful I got to be a part of," said Tiernan, whose research is on the ethics of using a genetic engineering technology called gene drives to eradicate harmful species, like malaria-transmitting mosquitoes.

Tiernan, a [biology and society](#) student in the ecology, economics and ethics of the environment track, helped coordinate an [NSF-funded workshop](#) that brought together ethicists and scientists to come up with [a list of considerations](#) that should be made before deciding to use a gene drive, which Tiernan shared in her winning poster.

Mohammed, another graduate student from ASU's biology and society program and a researcher in the [Cooper Biology Education Research Lab](#), was similarly excited about her win: "It feels unbelievable! I couldn't believe it at first — I had to re-read the email twice."

Mohammed's research was on the effect of university science professors revealing their mental health struggles to students. She found that doing so can positively affect students who also struggle with mental health, but might also risk being perceived more negatively by other students, meaning it's a decision that each professor should weigh.

"I felt really emotional and very grateful for the efforts that my mentors put into training me, and I was proud to have something to show for our collective efforts," Mohammed said.

In addition to each students' own research mentors, Professor [Jane Maienschein](#), from the Center for Biology and Society, and [Georgette Briggs](#), from Barrett, The Honors College, also offer students extra feedback and the opportunity to practice their presentations every year.

The Center for Biology and Society has been funding undergraduates to travel to AAAS since 2010, giving many students the chance to present at a large science conference, often for the first time.

That was the case for Emma James, an undergraduate in the biomedical engineering program as well as a researcher at the [ASU-Banner Neurodegenerative Disease Research Center](#). Her poster presented data she had collected and analyzed on the correlation between inflammation in the brain and other symptoms associated with Alzheimer's disease.

"It was super nerve-wracking, honestly," said James, who is hoping to go to medical school after finishing her undergraduate degree. "But it was a really cool experience. I love dressing up and going to conferences — it's so much fun. And I was not expecting to win at all, so it was a great feeling."

Undergraduate Helen Nguyen had a similar experience: "Oh my gosh, it's so scary," she said, laughing. "But it was also really exciting. I felt like I finally got to tell people about my research, which I'd been working on all summer. After this, I can talk to people about it in more general terms, so people understand me a bit more."

Nguyen's poster showcased her work developing a 3D-printed biostructure that could automatically administer insulin for people with diabetes.

Three more ASU students won honorable mentions: undergraduate Ruhika Das and graduate students [Jynx Weaver](#) and [Annie Weaver-Bryant](#).

"I only had about three minutes to present, so that pushed me to be clear and concise to get the main ideas across quickly," said Das, a neuroscience undergraduate. "I think that helped me become a much more effective communicator."

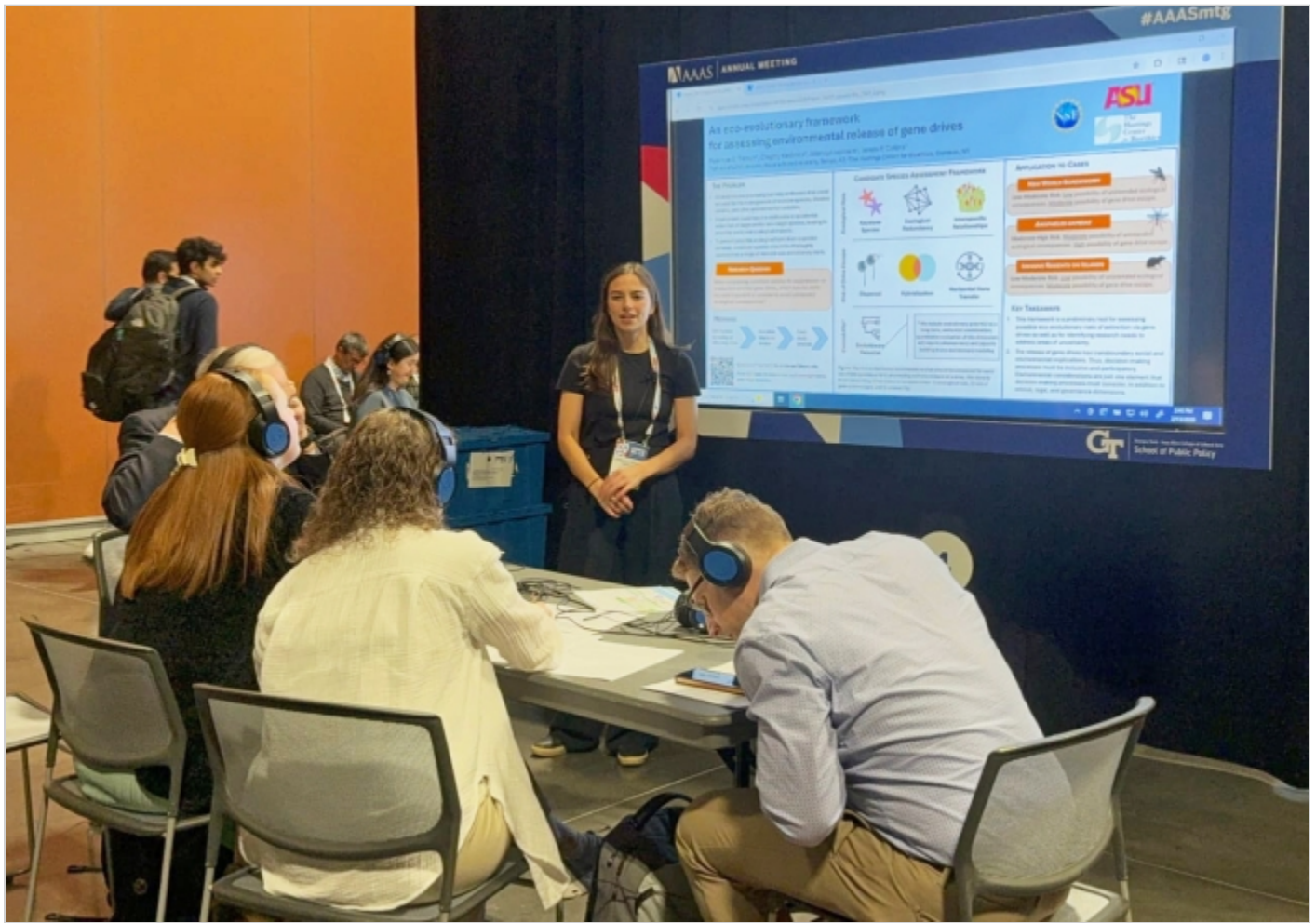
Das presented on her work studying proteins involved with diseases like Parkinson's and Lewy body dementia in hopes of finding therapeutic solutions for such diseases.

"I'm really proud of the work I put into this project, and it's so rewarding to see that steady effort pay off," Das said. "I'm excited for the future opportunities to share my research and keep growing as a scientist."

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Graduate student Becca Tiernan presents at the AAAS e-poster competition. Courtesy photo

**Text image(s)**



Biology and society students who competed in the e-poster competition. From left: Baylee Edwards, Mary Kahraman, Tasneem Mohammed, Ben Chan, Megha Pillai, Jynx Weaver and Federico Mellani. Courtesy photo





Helen Nguyen and Georgette Briggs, courtesy photo