THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

SPRING 2026 EDITION

IN COMMUNITY

Discover how we advance the public good through the power of graduate education

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UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

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Dear partners in innovation and impact,

For our inaugural edition of the Graduate School magazine, we wanted to begin with the fundamentals: who we are, what we do and most importantly, *who we do it for*.

At our core, the University of Washington Graduate School is a community of scholars, educators and leaders working across disciplines to build stronger, healthier and more equitable communities. We do this by creating the conditions for graduate students to thrive intellectually, professionally and personally.

The UW Graduate School champions an interdisciplinary mindset, fosters collaboration across academic units, seeds innovation and equips graduate students to thrive long after they leave our campuses.

That's the spirit behind *In community*. This theme reflects our conviction that graduate education is not an isolated pursuit. It is a powerful, generative force that links people and ideas across departments, campuses and communities. We are a community, building community, for the public good.

We believe graduate education must go beyond deepening expertise. It must prepare scholars to lead in research, in classrooms, in public discourse and in the industries and communities they serve. That's why the UW Graduate School champions an interdisciplinary mindset, fosters collaboration across academic units, seeds innovation and equips graduate students to thrive long after they leave our campuses.

This work is made possible through strategic investment in graduate education. Across the stories in this magazine, you will see how philanthropy directly advances three priorities: attracting exceptional talent, supporting student success and accelerating innovation that serves the public good.

Over the past year, we've navigated a landscape shaped by both familiar and emerging pressures—economic uncertainty, political division and shifting expectations around the role of higher education. As a historian of education, I know these forces are not new. History reminds us that student activism, for instance, has long been a powerful driver of justice and reform. But its impact—whether it fuels meaningful change or deepens discord—depends on how it's channeled.

What grounds us in times of uncertainty is our shared sense of purpose—a deep commitment to our students, to the communities we serve and to the future generations. This is more than a mission statement; it is a collective calling. We return to it not only because history shows its power, but because it reflects who we are.

We don't yet have all the answers to the complex questions facing higher education today. But we do have a clear sense of purpose—and a deep well of talent and resolve. Together, we can shape solutions that are thoughtful, inclusive and enduring.

Thank you for being part of this work.

Joy Williamson-Lott
Dean, The Graduate School
University of Washington

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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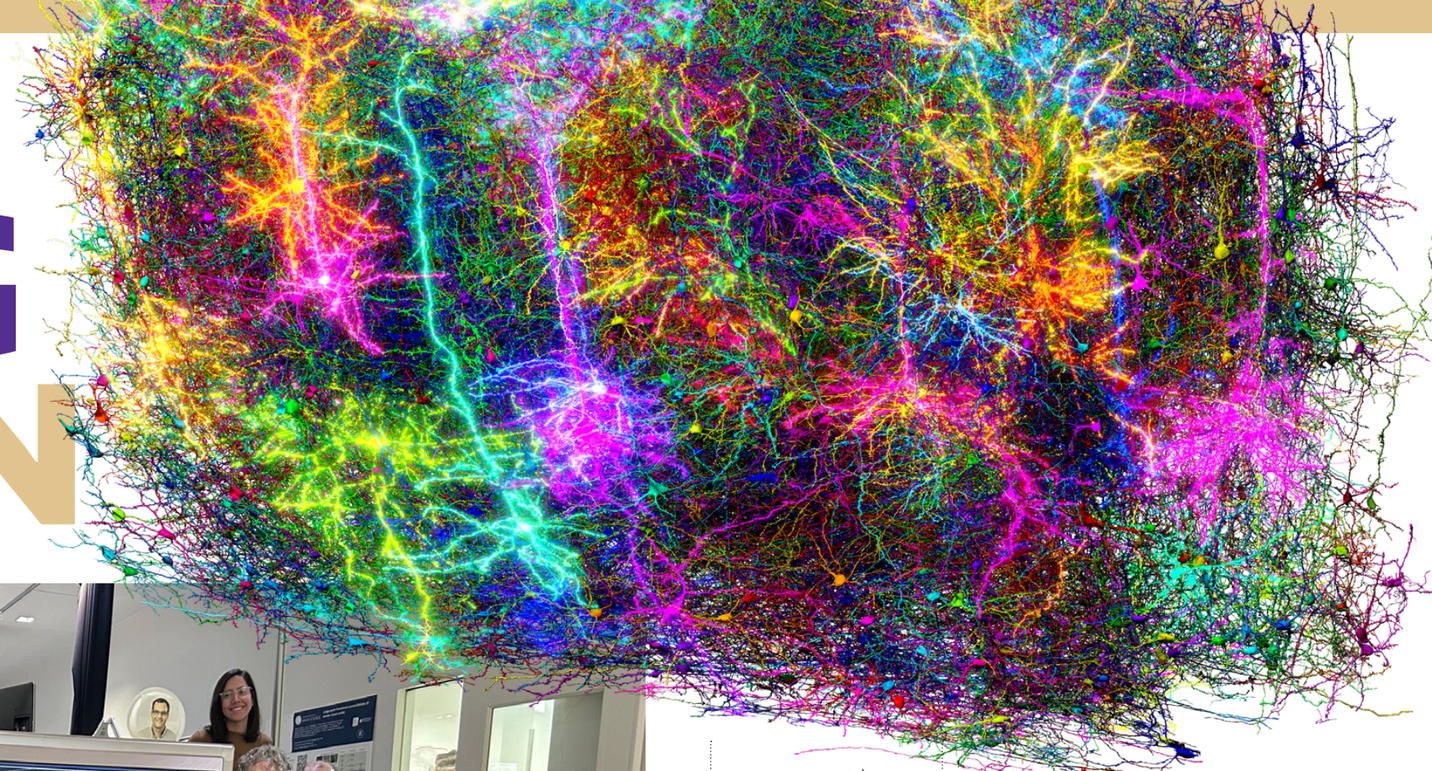
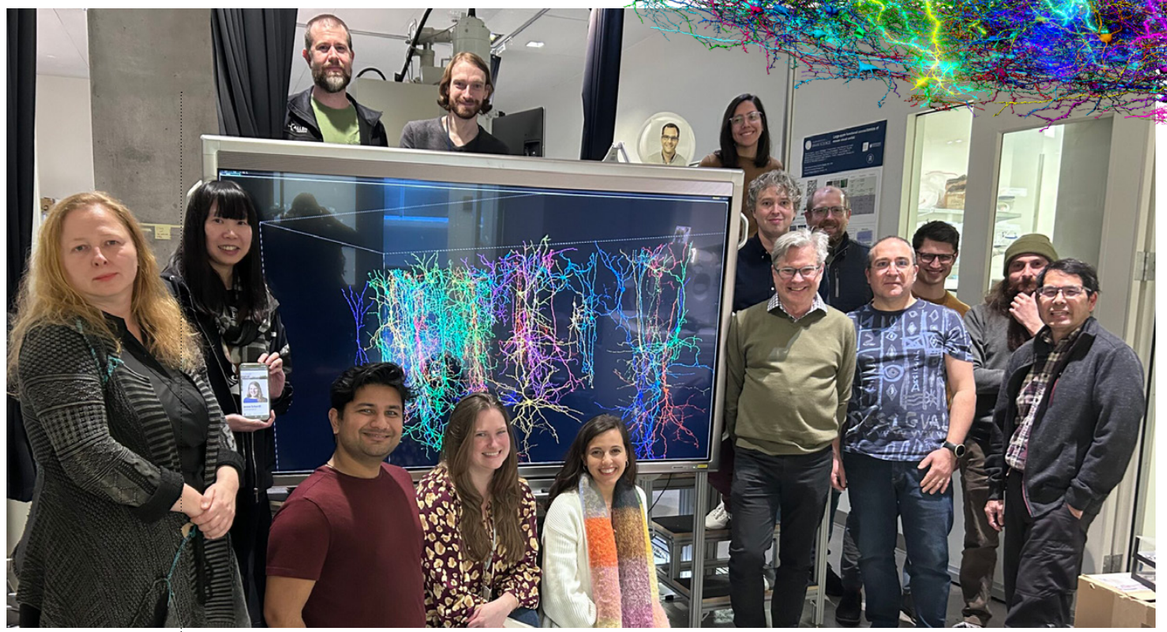
DECODING THE BRAIN



ALUM PROFILE

Leila Elabbady's research is reshaping how we understand and access neuroscience

STORY BY TATIANA RODRIGUEZ



ABOVE: This 3D rendered map details more than 500 million brain synapses.

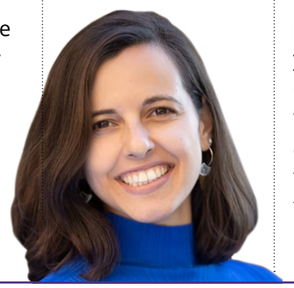
MIDDLE: Leila Elabbady (lower center) with the members of the Electron Microscopy team at the Allen Institute.

Leila Elabbady never set out to become a scientist.

As a liberal arts student at Wellesley College, she enrolled in neuroscience to satisfy a science requirement. But what began as a checkbox turned into a revelation.

"I fell in love with the idea of being able to understand ourselves and our biology through science," Elabbady recalls. That moment of curiosity ignited a passion that would shape the course of her life.

After graduating, Elabbady returned to Seattle and joined the Allen Institute,



where she spent four years contributing to pioneering work in large-scale neural imaging and data analysis. Her first two years were with the Synapse Biology team, developing intricate imaging pipelines to label and illuminate the hidden architecture of cells. She then transitioned to the Electron Microscopy team where they were revolutionizing how we study the brain — working to map entire brain circuits at 4 nanometer resolution.

"We were looking at cells in a way we never had before," she says. "They were so beautiful, so complex—and nothing like the textbook drawings."

Drawn to this complexity, Elabbady pivoted to computational neuroscience, helping to develop tools that make sense of vast neural datasets—tools that would become essential to the future of brain science. The experience planted a bold new goal: push the boundaries of what we know about the brain and pave the way for others to do the same.

Today, Elabbady is a research scientist at the Allen Institute, graduating with her Ph.D. from the Neuroscience Graduate Program at the University of Washington, where she was co-advised by John Tuthill at UW and Forrest Collman at the Allen Institute. Her work sits at the intersection of experimental science and cutting-edge computational tools, unlocking new ways to see—and understand—the nervous system.

Elabbady is part of a landmark effort to map the brain at an unprecedented scale. Her research contributed to the MICrONS project, an ambitious federal initiative involving over 150 scientists nationwide.

DID YOU KNOW?

Leila Elabbady was an ARCS scholar. Learn more about ARCS on page 26.

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"The dataset includes around 200,000 cells," she explains. "But when you first look at it, everything is unlabeled. You don't know what's a neuron or what's glia, let alone what type of neuron it might be. Not knowing what you're looking at makes it really hard to extract meaningful insights."

Her major contribution? A model that classifies brain cells by analyzing their cell bodies—transforming that vast, grayscale terrain into a vibrant map of cellular identity. "It gives researchers the ability to see which types of neurons are present and how they connect," she says. "Ultimately, it's a tool to help the community do better science and hopefully accelerate discovery."

For Elabbady, making science open and accessible is as important as making it accurate. That's why she's especially proud that the MICrONS data is publicly available.

"Anyone can go online and explore the brain—students, teachers, undergrads, anyone with access to the internet," she explains. "I would love to see this data in classrooms so kids can click around and see what neurons really look like. That kind of exposure early on could be life changing."

Her passion for making science inclusive is personal. "My first neuroscience class was a fluke, and now I'm here," says Elabbady. "I want other students—especially those who may not think of themselves as scientists—to get the chance to be curious."

For where she wants to go next, Elabbady hopes she continues to increase our understanding of the world around us and make it accessible along the way. "As long as I am exploring the unknown and building things useful to others, I'll be happy." W

Leila Elabbady (second from left) with other Tuthill lab students.

I would love to see this data in classrooms so kids can click around and see what neurons really look like. That kind of exposure early on could be life changing."

LEILA ELABBADY
Ph.D. graduate in Neuroscience

INVEST IN SCIENCE

Why this work matters—and how it's funded

Breakthroughs like this depend on sustained investment in graduate research. Large-scale initiatives like MICrONS — and the tools that make them usable by scientists, educators and students worldwide — require flexible funding that allows graduate researchers to take intellectual risks and collaborate across the university and institutions.

Philanthropic support enables graduate students like Leila to focus on discovery, contribute to globally shared datasets and accelerate scientific progress that benefits society. W

AWARD & FELLOWSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

BONDERMAN FELLOWSHIP

When the journey matters most

Each year, select UW students embark on transformative solo journeys abroad as Bonderman Fellows. Established by alumnus David Bonderman in 1995—and expanded through a $10 million endowment in 2017—the fellowship has supported over 280 students in pursuing independent global exploration. Open to graduate, professional and undergraduate students, the program encourages immersive, unstructured travel to unfamiliar cultures and regions. Fellows do not study, conduct research, or join organized programs; instead, they are challenged to embrace the unexpected, broaden their perspectives and engage with the world in deeply personal and meaningful ways.

bonderman.uw.edu/fellow-profiles/

SCAN TO VIEW
Learn about UW Bonderman Fellows and their world travels

FULBRIGHT SCHOLARS

From Washington to the world

As part of the U.S. government's flagship international exchange program, this year's UW Fulbright Fellows are advancing global impact through projects on three continents. From developing battery control systems in Brazil to exploring the migration of nurses in the Philippines to the U.S. to enhancing culturally responsive teaching in Norway, their work reflects the breadth and depth of graduate education at the University of Washington. These fellowships exemplify the Graduate School's mission to prepare students for leadership across borders, equipping them to drive change through research, collaboration and cross-cultural understanding.

grad.uw.edu/25-26-fulbright-recipients/

SCAN TO VIEW
Learn about UW's Fulbright Scholars and their life-changing research

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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How UW alumna, Dr. Martha Gonzalez (GWSS Alumni '13) channels art, activism and community to build a more just world

TAPESTRY OF SOUND & STORY

STORY BY ANNIE PELLICCIOTTI

On a cool January evening in 2025, approximately 150 community members from across the Puget Sound region gathered to welcome the return of UW alumna, Dr. Martha Gonzalez (GWSS '13).

She opened her talk with a rhythm, a song, a story, that carried the weight of memory, movement and a call to listen.

Gonzalez, a Grammy Award-winning musician and MacArthur "Genius" Fellow is an *artivista*— a term she coined, that recognizes artists whose work is inseparable from activism. She is a scholar who understands that theory must transcend the page and be experienced wholly in the body, the street, the studio and the community. Her message that night was simple and profound: art is not separate from struggle—it is the lifeblood of it.

Raised in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles, Gonzalez grew up surrounded by sound, culture and contradictions. She witnessed how music could lift spirits and also bear witness, how lyrics could be both lullabies and protests. As she spoke to the audience, she moved fluidly between reflection and performance, sharing songs from her band Quetzal, which draws on Chicanx rock, Afro-Cuban rhythms and son jarocho traditions from Veracruz, Mexico. These weren't just performances; they were practices in cultural memory and communal resistance.

What Gonzalez offered that night was both insight and an invitation. She spoke of *fandango*—a communal music and dance tradition from Veracruz—as a model for what art can do: connect, energize and organize. In the *fandango*, everyone participates. There is no audience. It's a democratic space, grounded in joy and dialogue.

For Gonzalez, this form has become a metaphor for her life's work, blurring boundaries between academic and artist, scholar and citizen, individual and collective.

One of the most moving parts of the evening was her reflection on working with incarcerated women through collective songwriting. She described how, within the walls of a prison, music can become a vehicle for reclaiming voice and dignity. These women, often silenced by

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WHO WE ARE

The Graduate School's Office of Public Lectures

At the UW Graduate School, we believe higher education goes beyond the walls of a classroom; and that it should be accessible to everyone. Our public lecture programming allows the Graduate School to bring leading thinkers, artists and changemakers from around the world into conversation with our broader community. We invite the public to remain curious and engage with bold ideas and groundbreaking research.

SCAN TO LEARN MORE
Explore the many creative thought-leaders OPL has hosted

BY THE NUMBERS

42
Nobel Prize recipients have given lectures

32
MacArthur Genius Grant recipients

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society, used song not just to express pain, but to imagine futures beyond it.

"There's something powerful that happens," Gonzalez said, "when people feel heard—truly heard—and then realize they can shape the world around them."

This philosophy of participation, of co-creation, runs deep in her work. It's also why she resists the idea of the solitary genius. "The myth of individual brilliance erases the labor of community," she noted. "Our knowledge, our resilience, our creativity—they're all built together." Whether in her research, her activism, or her collaborations with students and musicians, Gonzalez returns again and again to this idea: that liberation is a collective act, and art is one of its oldest tools.

For the graduate student researchers and emerging scholars in the room that night, her words resonated. She modeled what it looks like to carry your scholarship into the world, to share it, to ground it in the lives and languages of real people.

In an era where misinformation spreads easily and division runs deep, Gonzalez's work reminds us that communication—clear, honest, deeply felt—can itself be a form of resistance.

As the evening closed, the final chords of her last song hung in the air a little longer. The audience had an intimate invitation into a way of being in the world where knowledge is embodied, justice is joyful, and music is more than melody; it's a method.

And so, Gonzalez left us with a question echoing in the silence: *What will you create, and who will you create it for?* W

Dr. Martha Gonzalez (GWSS Alumni '13) performed with her band, Quetzal.

"There's something powerful that happens when people feel heard—truly heard—and then realize they can shape the world around them."

DR. MARTHA GONZALEZ
Grammy-winning musician and MacArthur "Genius" Fellow

SCAN TO WATCH
You can find Quetzal's performance on OPL's YouTube page >

SHORT STORY

Quetzal

On January 20, the University of Washington Graduate School's Office of Public Lectures welcomed Grammy Award-winning band Quetzal for a stirring musical performance that set the stage for Dr. Martha Gonzalez's keynote address later that week. Blending Chicano rock, son jarocho, funk, jazz and spoken word, the band brought the audience into a powerful soundscape of resistance, identity and community. More than a concert, it was a living example of how art can move people to think critically and collectively.

Formed in East Los Angeles in the 1990s, Quetzal has become a cultural force in American music, winning a Grammy for their 2013 album *Imaginaries* and earning recognition from the Library of Congress and Smithsonian Folkways. The performance was a vivid prelude to Dr. Gonzalez's talk on the power of storytelling, music and activism. As an artist and academic Gonzalez bridges scholarly insight with community-rooted practice, challenging audiences to see culture as both rich in history and action.

For the Graduate School, this evening embodied our mission: to connect scholarship with the broader public in ways that inspire, provoke and engage. It was a reminder that public education is not just about ideas—it's about impact. And through programs like this, we bring boundary-breaking thinkers and creators into dialogue with the communities they serve. W

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

DESIGNING TECH FOR ALL VOICES

ALUM PROFILE

UW alum Jay Cunningham envisions a world where technology serves people first—and everyone has a say in how it's built

STORY BY TATIANA RODRIGUEZ

Growing up, Jay Cunningham was always interested in technology, but his family could never afford the latest gadgets. Instead, he would watch product reviews on YouTube and dream of a future where he could build the technology that captivated him. During high school, an encounter with Amazon's Alexa failing to understand his dialect and accent made him realize the promises of tech weren't all-inclusive.

"I'm from a Black southern town in rural Mississippi. People who make AI technology don't look or sound like me when they talk. So how is Alexa supposed to know what I ask?" Jay says.

During his undergraduate career at the University of Alabama, Jay studied computer science and interned in software engineering and product management at Lockheed Martin, Oracle and Meta. He became interested in human-computer interaction as an undergraduate research assistant in the Human-Technology Interaction Lab (HTIL), where he examined people's perceptions and comfort with robots. This newfound fascination marked a turning point, pushing him to consider a future he had never envisioned—pursuing a Ph.D. and eventually leading him to the Human Centered Design Engineering (HCDE) program at the University of Washington.

Jay throwing the "W" with Dubs.

"I'm intentional in finding ways to provide mentorship because it's not always apparent where students can find support."

JAY CUNNINGHAM
Ph.D. graduate, Human Computer Design Engineering

Interactions with AI

At UW, Jay pursued doctoral research at the intersection of critical computing and human-centered design. His work examined how technology can either reinforce or challenge inequities, particularly in artificial intelligence and machine learning.

"Black and African American English speakers typically have a much harder time interacting with language technologies like voice assistance and transcription, or even speech-to-text," Jay says. His research is improving how AI systems recognize and respond to diverse speech patterns—addressing bias in widely used technologies and expanding access for historically underrepresented communities. Throughout his academic career, Jay also advocated for representation in engineering spaces. He became the first African American man in the HCDE Ph.D. program and helped attract a record number of Black graduate students through his service, mentorship and advocacy. At UW, he mentored undergraduate students and volunteered at Seattle Public Schools.

"I'm intentional in finding ways to provide mentorship because it's not

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Jay Cunningham's research advanced equitable speech recognition through community-based approaches.

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always apparent where students can find support," he says.

Jay also gained industry experience through internships at Google's People + AI, Apple Human-centered AI/ML and Microsoft Research Fairness in AI. His work was recognized early with the Graduate Student Excellence & Equity (GSEE) Award. This accolade marked the beginning of Jay's engagement with GSEE, leading him to connect with the GEM National Consortium. This organization cultivates pathways for Black students venturing into STEM related fields. Support from programs like GSEE—made possible through philanthropic investment—plays a critical role in recruiting, retaining and empowering scholars who are advancing more equitable and inclusive technologies.

In 2023, Washington Governor Jay Inslee appointed him to the UW Board of Regents, where he contributed a critical student perspective on issues of equity, access and representation.

Jay alongside Board Chair David Zeeck, former UW President Ana Mari Cauce and University of Washington College of Engineering Dean Nancy Allbritton.

After UW

Jay graduated from the University of Washington with his Ph.D. in Human Centered Design & Engineering in spring 2025. This past fall, he began his career as an Assistant Professor of Computer Science at DePaul University's College of Computing and Digital Media in Chicago.

At DePaul, he is founding and leading the Responsible AI Systems & Societal Experiences (RAISE) Lab, which advances critical socio-technical research on responsible AI and democratic data governance. His long-term vision is to ensure technology aligns with community needs and values, even for those who may not be experts in the field.

"Service and research are my muse. I always want a foot in research and innovation, but I also love community work. I do not think that will ever stop," he says.

For Jay, this next chapter is about building technology that is not only innovative but also fair, inclusive and transformative for communities that technology too often overlooks. W

WHO WE ARE

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

AND THE INVESTMENT BEHIND IT

For more than 55 years, the **Office of Graduate Student Equity & Excellence (GSEE)** has been a driving force for equity and inclusion in graduate education at the University of Washington. Formerly known as GO-MAP, GSEE continues to lead efforts that expand access and success for graduate students from diverse perspectives and experiences at the UW. Through advocacy, community-building and programming, GSEE fosters environments where every graduate student can thrive, strengthening UW's ability to educate the diverse leaders our communities and world need.

KEY FACTS

GSEE provides approximately $2M in annual fellowships and awards to support the recruitment and success of graduate students with diverse perspectives and experiences.

GSEE offers year-round virtual and in-person programming as part of its commitment to enhancing scholarship, professional development and community building for graduate students.

The Outreaching Grads (OG) Program introduces graduate students to opportunities and resources that help build community within the framework of the graduate student cycle.

SCAN TO LEARN MORE

Explore the important work that GSEE does

Get to know a GSEE Ph.D. student

For **Rachael Tamngin**, a Ph.D. student in Sociocultural Anthropology, museums are not just institutions of the past—they can be transformative spaces for community, healing and belonging. Honored nationally by the American Alliance of Museums, Rachael is redefining access for Pacific Islander students at UW, where they represent just 1% of the graduate population. With support from the Sinegal Fellowship, she can fully pursue her research, mentorship and advocacy, creating pathways for underrepresented students to see themselves in higher education.

Get to know a GSEE master's student

For **Mikyla Sakurai**, a Master's student in the UW School of Social Work and School of Public Health, research is more than scholarship—it's a bridge toward equity for Indigenous communities. Her recent work includes a systematic review of how indigeneity is presented in suicide studies among American Indian and Alaska Native populations. It challenges narrow narratives that focus only on risk, instead centering strength alongside community voice and healing. With her interdisciplinary training, Mikyla is pushing for more just and grounded public health and social work practices, making space for Indigenous resilience, dignity and leadership in research and care. W

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

IN THREE MINUTES OR LESS

How graduate students are shaping the future—one story at a time

STORY BY ANNIE PELLICCIOTTI

Kevin Jiang stepped onto the stage with a mission: to explain years of complex bioengineering research in just three minutes. But what he really shared was something deeper. It was the story of a family member's cancer diagnosis, a moment that sparked his drive to create better, faster, more accessible diagnostic tools. It was a call for urgency—and for hope.

Jiang, a 2025 Ph.D. graduate in Bioengineering, wasn't alone. He was one of ten finalists in the 2025 University of Washington Three Minute Thesis (3MT®) competition, a celebration not only of groundbreaking research but of the power of language to connect science to society.

UW 3MT® First Place Winner Kevin Jiang with dean Joy Williamson-Lott.

In just three minutes, graduate students must distill their work—years of experiments, fieldwork and sleepless nights—into a message anyone can understand, and everyone can feel. For Ph.D. student Grace Umutesi, that meant standing before a packed room and making a case for single-dose HPV vaccination in East Africa, where she grew up and now works to strengthen public health systems. Her research speaks to global disparities, but her message was grounded in something universally resonant: the right to health, and the urgency of action.

The impact of these stories goes far beyond the room. They represent a shift in how graduate students are trained, not only to become researchers, but to become communicators, advocates and leaders. In a time when public trust in science is fragile and global challenges grow more complex, the ability to explain, to persuade and to humanize research becomes essential.

The 3MT® competition, hosted each spring by the Graduate School and UW Libraries, isn't just a contest. It's a training ground for the next generation of scholar-leaders. These students are proving that graduate research isn't confined to labs or libraries. It lives in communities, policies, classrooms and conversations. And sometimes, it only takes three minutes to change the way we think, feel and act. W

Left to Right: Judge Dr. Briana Furch, judge Dr. Bruce Montgomery, Dean Joy Williamson-Lott, Runner Up & People's Choice Awards Winner Grace Umutesi, First Place Winner Kevin Jiang, judge Dr. Tricia Serio and judge Irene Valdés Wochinger.

WHO WE ARE

About UW 3MT®

Since 2017, **32 master's and 51 doctoral students** have competed at UW 3MT®.

Presenters have come across the UW graduate community (e.g., the departments of Spanish & Portuguese studies, education, communication and drama to bioengineering, aeronautics & astronautics, electrical engineering, data science and more). Presenters gain skills in public speaking to audiences outside of their disciplines.

Programs like 3MT® are supported through investment in graduate student professional development—equipping scholars not only to conduct research, but to translate it into real-world impact.

SCAN TO LEARN MORE
Find past UW Three Minute Thesis® winners and more

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Wesley Hull standing in one of the tide flats he studied.

ALUM PROFILE

Ph.D. graduate, Wesley Hull, receives the Graduate School Medal for his research to improve coastal ecosystems

STORY BY TATIANA RODRIGUEZ

ROOTED IN THE TIDES

In Northern California, Wesley Hull grew up fishing on the shores of Humboldt Bay with his father. In this quiet corner of the state, shucking is more than a task—it's a ritual of patience, grit and deep connection to place. As a kid, he and his father would spend hours on the water or in the mud, fishing and harvesting shellfish. They frequently visited the docks where they chatted with other community members and commercial fisherman – some of whom his father had previously built relationships with through construction work. These early experiences sparked Wesley's interest in estuarine environments, but also the people most connected with them. As a graduate student he maintained his connection to this environment and community by working as an oyster farmer while studying biology.

Wesley's research explores how burrowing shrimp impact key habitat-forming species—both ecologically and economically—and how these changes affect shellfish farmers in Washington's outer coast communities.

Hull, Ph.D. Philosophy from the Department of Biology at the University of Washington, is this year's Graduate School Medal Award winner. This award is given to recognize doctoral candidate "scholar-citizens," whose academic expertise and social awareness are integrated in a way that demonstrates active civic engagement and a capacity to promote political, cultural and social change.

His research explores how burrowing shrimp impact key habitat-forming species—both ecologically and economically—and how these changes affect shellfish farmers in Washington's outer coast communities. With the help of the biology department, Washington State Sea Grant and shellfish farmers, he has examined ecosystem engineers, animals that can modify their habitats through the creation of structure or physical behavior, and how they interact with one another.

"Burrowing shrimp in the outer coast estuaries in Washington are abundant," explains Hull. "They can exist at very high densities and transform large areas of a tide flat."

Research on the coast

The estuarine environments in Washington—especially in the outer coast regions—are perfectly suited for burrowing shrimp. The conditions support not only their growth but also their role as ecological engineers. Their sheer abundance and constant burrowing drastically alter the surface of tide flats, exerting a strong impact on the aquaculture industry—one that's becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

For shellfish farmers along Washington's outer coast, burrowing shrimp presents a significant challenge. Traditionally, many growers rely on a low-maintenance, natural method to cultivate oysters. They scatter clutch—tiny shells covered in tiny oysters—across the surface of the tide flats during high tide. Then, they wait. Over the course of several years, those tiny oysters mature into

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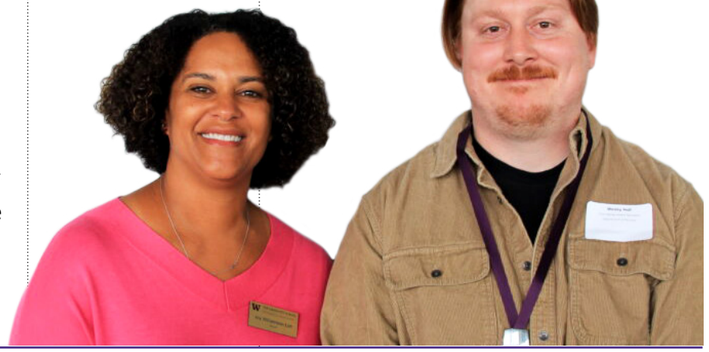
Graduate School Dean Joy Williamson-Lott and Wesley Hull at the Graduate Medal Award Ceremony.



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larger clusters of oysters, which can later be harvested, separated and sold either whole or as shucked product.

Unfortunately, burrowing shrimp makes this a difficult process. As they burrow, excavated sediments are ejected to the surface—coarser particles settle quickly, while finer particles remain suspended in the water column before eventually settling in the surrounding area. This burrowing behavior acts like a sediment-conveyor belt, cycling coarser sediment back into the tide flat and gradually transporting fine sediments out of the bed. "They end up burying those oysters with that ejected sediment, causing them to suffocate and die," Hull explains. The result is a tide flat that becomes soft and unstable. Through his research, he identified the shrimp densities and mechanisms responsible for declining oyster survival.

Hull's research looks to understand not just the oyster-shrimp conflict, but also how burrowing shrimp interacts with another key player in the ecosystem: eelgrass.

Yielding results

For his dissertation, Hull set out to discover which species dominate when these two engineers meet. Previous studies in California had shown eelgrass winning out, with dense mats of rhizomes—or underground plant stems—forming physical barriers that kept shrimp at bay. But in Washington, things were different.

"Eelgrass [in the outer coast] tends to grow larger but in lower densities," he says, "and that begged the question—does eelgrass still dominate in these lower-density systems?"

Hull conducted a series of surveys, observing the distributions of shrimp and eelgrass across habitat boundaries. "Imagine a solid vertical line," he says, "on one side you have an eelgrass bed, and on the other, bare habitat that could have shrimp. I quantified shrimp and eelgrass across that boundary." Additionally, he transplanted eelgrass into shrimp beds to investigate whether the life stage of eelgrass at the time of interaction influenced the outcome.

The results were telling. "It didn't really matter how much eelgrass there was," Hull notes. "Burrowing shrimp were always present. I never found a sample with no shrimp in eelgrass." On the other hand, eelgrass was never present above moderate shrimp densities, and newly emerged eelgrass seedlings were more susceptible to their burrowing activities than adult shoots.

His findings confirmed what many farmers had long suspected: it's not just the presence of shrimp, but their relentless burrowing and sediment reworking that turns a productive oyster bed into a graveyard. He also showed that eelgrass could not serve as a nature-based solution for reducing shrimp abundance. Hull was able to present his findings to farmers in a way that translated his science into practical, accessible insights that were relevant, validating farmers' concerns through ecological knowledge and experience as stewards of their own systems.

The collaboration between science and farmers helped Hull earn this prestigious award. At first, he was surprised that he had been nominated. Stating that he wasn't an honor roll student but felt honored to be nominated by his department and committee. "It was validating to know that my work had made such an impact on people and to be recognized," Hull says.

His biggest piece of advice for awardees nominated next year is to explain the impact your work had on the communities you worked with or are most closely connected to. "Rather than focusing solely on science, I chose to explain the origin of my work and what that meant to those communities involved," Hull explains. "This was a great conclusion to my academic career." W

"It was validating to know that my work had made such an impact on people and to be recognized."

WESLEY HULL
Ph.D. graduate who received the 2025 Graduate School Medal Award

Wesley Hull pumping shrimp out of the tide flat he studied.

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

Husky 100 Honoree: Delia Gomez

University of Washington Bothell graduate student Delia Gomez was named a Husky 100, a recognition of students who make the most of their Husky experience. As she completes her Master of Education in Critical Education Change and Leadership, Delia has consistently championed the power of student voices and stories to shape futures, just as her mentors did for her.

"As a Mexican, Yaqui, first-generation college student, I am proud to be a representative of my communities on both the Seattle and Bothell campuses," Delia said. "Throughout my educational journey, pursuing a bachelor's at UW Seattle and now a master's at UW Bothell, I have made a concerted effort to help students leverage their stories and experiences to inform their futures, as my mentors did for me. I am honored to be selected as a Husky 100 recipient, one dedicated to uplifting underrepresented students and continuing the OMA&D legacy of cultivating tomorrow's leaders at the University of Washington." W

Delia Gomez, Master's in Critical Education Change & Leadership

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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RESHAPING CITIES FOR RESILIENCE

UW Graduate School alumnae, Katherine Idziorek's UW experience sparked a lifelong journey in designing cities that work—for people and for the future

STORY BY TATIANA RODRIGUEZ

As an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota, Dr. Katherine Idziorek had a chance encounter with a display of architecture students' studio work. She became fascinated by the dynamic nature of design — how it could transcend style — and enhance ecology, strengthen community and transform our ways of thinking.

"I was captivated by the models, the watercolors and the way design can help us reimagine and re-shape the built environment around us," Idziorek says.

Her passion brought her to the University of Washington to pursue a master's in architecture and an urban design certificate. She knew the UW would be her home the moment she set foot on campus and was welcome a grove of cherry blossom trees, which line the university's quad in spring. When in full bloom, the trees are a natural architectural marvel — profuse pastels as hanging clouds of pink and white.

It did not take long before Idziorek discovered that learning could be enriched through multidisciplinary collaboration and travel. For her a field studio in China with UW Urban Design and Planning Professor Dan Abramson marked a career-defining turning point that would set her on a path to urban planning. Spending six weeks living and working in a completely different urban environment, collaborating across disciplines and seeing firsthand how cities functioned outside the U.S. shifted her entire perspective. "I learned that urban planning wasn't just about policy or design—it was about people, communities and resilience," says Idziorek. She added a second master's in urban planning, determined to explore how cities could be shaped to better support those who live in them.

Her time in China affirmed that experiencing other places, cultures and urban systems could be the greatest source of inspiration. She continued her studies at the UW in Denmark on a fellowship, spent a quarter in the Netherlands, took shorter trips to Mexico, Taiwan and Japan, and even interned at an architecture firm in Shanghai for six months. These experiences buoyed her understanding of cities as living systems, made up of interconnected and mutually supportive physical, social and ecological networks.

Dr. Idziorek joined geography and earth sciences students on an environmental science field course in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in 2024, researching public lands across the Sonoran Desert in California and Arizona.

"Having the opportunity to travel and learn about different approaches to designing cities and urban systems—especially to be able to experience those systems first-hand—was incredibly valuable to me as an early-career urban planner," Idziorek says. "Thinking through the implications of different approaches to urban design for supporting sustainable and resilient cities really piqued my interest in research."

These global experiences informed her career trajectory. After completing two master's degrees, she stepped away from academia, working in urban planning and design consulting firms around Seattle for nearly a decade. Her projects ranged from campus planning to urban design to transportation infrastructure, always with a focus on public engagement—ensuring

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the voices of the people most affected were at the center of decision-making. Idziorek engaged with urban design in a volunteer capacity as well, advocating for multimodal transportation as co-President of the Uptown Alliance community organization and helping to shape urban development as a member of Seattle's West Design Review Board.

Idziorek also began teaching at UW as an affiliate instructor while working as a consultant. "It was energizing to be back at UW and to engage with the students and faculty in the Department of Urban Design and Planning. I realized that a career in academia was something I would like to pursue," Idziorek says.

She knew research was something she had always enjoyed in the private sector but wanted to make it a bigger focus of her work. In 2016 she applied to the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Urban Design and Planning where her dissertation research focused on how communities can work together and leverage local resources to prepare for a large-scale disaster, in this case a magnitude 9.0 Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake that would have regional impact. She studied how different communities—Laurelhurst and South Park in Seattle and Westport on Washington's Pacific coast—approached disaster preparedness through mutual aid and organizations.

"Although my research has shifted from the Pacific Northwest to Charlotte, I'm still focused on the themes of community, resilience and access to resources."

KATHERINE IDZIOREK
UW Graduate School alumnae

Idziorek and her team surveyed residents to uncover how social connections played a role in disaster preparedness and longer-term community resilience. Who knew who? Who had access to supplies? Were there hidden barriers—transportation issues, resource shortages, or gaps in infrastructure—that could be addressed ahead of time to support recovery? The goal wasn't just to understand how communities could withstand a disaster, but also how urban planning could strengthen community networks on a day-to-day basis, making cities more resilient even before disaster struck.

Now, Idziorek is an Assistant Professor in Geography and Community Planning at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Although she no longer studies earthquakes, her work in community resilience and her dedication to community-engaged research continues. In North Carolina, she focuses on a different kind of environmental threat: urban heat. After experiencing the 2021 heat dome event during her last summer in the Pacific Northwest, she became attuned to the growing threat of extreme heat—particularly for people living in urban areas. As the leading weather-related killer in the U.S., extreme heat has a multitude of effects on community resilience, ranging from public health impacts to infrastructure damage.

"Although my research has shifted from the Pacific Northwest to Charlotte, I'm still focused on the themes of community, resilience and access to resources," Idziorek says.

Idziorek's time at UW laid the groundwork for her research and teaching career at UNC Charlotte, where she now serves as a faculty affiliate member of the Charlotte Action Research Project, an interdisciplinary group of faculty and student researchers who build partnerships between the University and marginalized communities to address issues of social justice. Idziorek also engages and motivates her students in innovative ways outside the classroom. Every semester she makes a point to lead a hike with the Peaks and Professors student club, exploring different areas of North Carolina and combining research with a shared passion for the outdoors. This has allowed her to forge deeper connections with her students and has enabled some students to experience hiking for the first time.

"I always tell my graduate students, don't be afraid to try something new," Idziorek says. "Get out of your comfort zone and experience a new culture or living or traveling in a new place if you can."

Idziorek will transition to a new role as an Assistant Professor of Urban and Environmental Planning at the University of Virginia in the fall of 2026. W

Dr. Idziorek's Charlotte Heat Mappers research team (from left): Dr. Sandra Clinton, Dr. Matthew Eastin, graduate research assistant Joe Wiswell, Dr. Katherine Idziorek, graduate research assistant Adrian Croland, Dr. Michelle Zuñiga.

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

Award-Winning Researcher: Steven Golob

At UW Tacoma, Ph.D. student Steven Golob is proving the impact of persistence and creativity in research. A Carwein-Andrews Distinguished Fellow, Golob received the UW Distinguished Master's Thesis Award for STEM and the Western Association of Graduate Schools (WAGS) ProQuest Distinguished Thesis Award for his groundbreaking work on privacy-preserving artificial intelligence. His thesis revealed vulnerabilities in synthetic data creation, challenging assumptions about data security and pushing the conversation forward on global privacy standards.

"When I wrote the thing, I didn't think it would get much notice," Golob said. "But when it did, it made me realize that other people are thinking about this and it's an important issue." W

SCAN TO LEARN MORE
Read more about Steven Golob's work on data privacy

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A SHARED PURPOSE

A legacy of partnership between ARCS and the UW Graduate School

STORY BY ANNIE PELLICCIOTTI

2025-2026 ARCS President Margaret Breen

At the University of Washington, discovery is achieved together. It gains strength from community — a rich ecosystem of scholars, donors and partners joining with a shared purpose. For nearly five decades, the ARCS Foundation Seattle Chapter has stood at the heart of scientific advancement at the University of Washington. With more than $16.5 million in endowment funds held at UW, ARCS has created 52 named endowments and, in 2025 alone, is provided nearly $750,000 to support 113 UW scholars. That impact is transformative—not just for individual students, but for the world shaped by their discoveries.

"ARCS' support of science research at the University of Washington helps fuel innovation that can lead to life-saving medical breakthroughs and transformative technologies," said Margaret Breen, president of ARCS Seattle Chapter. "Washington's ecosystem at the crossroads of tech, healthcare and academia make UW a powerhouse for interdisciplinary research with real-world impact."

> **"Investing in UW science is investing in a smarter, healthier and more sustainable future for everyone."**
>
> **MARGARET BREEN**
> *ARCS Seattle Chapter President*

That visionary spirit extends beyond the lab. In 2006, ARCS Seattle became the first chapter nationwide to offer fellowship funding to nursing Ph.D. students, breaking new ground in recognizing nursing as a field of rigorous scientific research. Since then, ARCS fellowships have launched the careers of nurse-scientists now serving on the UW faculty and at leading institutions across the nation. W

AT A GLANCE: ARCS FOUNDATION SEATTLE CHAPTER

$16.5M+ in University of Washington endowments

52 named UW endowments

113 UW scholars received $747K in support in 2025

$2.5M+ in WSU endowments, supporting 35 scholars

HEAR FROM A DONOR

A donor's perspective

Polly and Andrew Kenefick are donors with ARCS and supported Ph.D. student, Terrance Wang

For ARCS donors, supporting UW is both personal and purposeful.

"For me, getting to know Terrance was an especially unique experience because I took several fisheries classes with him while completing my master's degree," Andrew said. "And, no, we did not compare grades, although I am confident that Terrence outshined me."

Beyond personal connections, the Kenefick feel the urgency of investing in future scientists.

"Science is at risk, especially science focused on the natural environment. We are keenly interested in ensuring that UW can train and motivate this generation of researchers so they can address the critical challenges we face today—and will face once the political pendulum swings back to revere critical scientific research."

Above: ARCS donors Polly and Andrew Kenefick.

Below: Terrance Wang, 2021-2024 ARCS Scholar

HEAR FROM A STUDENT

A scholar's story

Terrance Wang (2021–2024 ARCS Scholar, Aquatic and Fishery Sciences) is ready to take on big challenges

Drawn to UW by its sense of community, Terrance was inspired by alumni who continue to collaborate long after graduation. Today, his research diagnoses declines in marine megafauna—whales, sea turtles and sharks—while ranking the threats posed by unsustainable fishing and climate change. His findings are shaping conservation strategies designed to rebuild species and restore ecosystems.

Terrance is quick to highlight the importance of donor support:

"I have always been inspired by Polly and Andrew Kenefick's curiosity in science and passion for philanthropy. My donors also have personal interests in the marine world, and I am lucky to get to chat about the latest research findings with them." W

SCAN TO LEARN MORE
Read about ARCS Foundation

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

Your support fuels the students and ideas shaping the future

An investment in the Graduate School is an investment in the University of Washington's entire research enterprise. Graduate students are the driving force behind discovery, powering labs, advancing interdisciplinary work and translating ideas into real-world impact. When we invest in graduate education, we are not supporting a single program—we are strengthening the full ecosystem of research, innovation and public good.

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