



Welcome to the Community College Student Roadmap to the 2026 SACNAS Annual Conference!

As a community college student, you're taking an exciting step in your STEM journey! Whether you're exploring your interests, gaining hands-on experience, or thinking about what comes next, the SACNAS Annual Conference offers opportunities to build your confidence, explore STEM careers, connect with mentors and peers, and discover new possibilities for your future.

This roadmap was created to help you navigate the conference with purpose. Use it to set goals, find sessions and activities that spark your curiosity, connect with scientists and professionals, and explore opportunities that align with your interests.

Whether you're considering transferring to a four-year university, exploring research opportunities, thinking about graduate school, or discovering potential STEM careers, there's no single right way to experience the conference. Make this roadmap your own, stay curious, and leave feeling inspired, connected, and excited about the possibilities ahead!

Your roadmap starts here. *Where will the 2026 SACNAS Annual Conference take you next?*

FIRST STOP: Prepare Before You Arrive

Your SACNAS Annual Conference experience starts before you arrive! Use these resources to set goals, prepare to make connections, and explore opportunities that can help you take your next steps in STEM.

Consider how you'll introduce yourself, connect with mentors and professionals, explore educational and career pathways, and use SMART goals to turn your experience into meaningful next steps.

Define Your Conference Goals

Select one or two priorities for the conference:

- Build confidence introducing myself and sharing my interests
- Explore STEM fields, careers, and research opportunities
- Learn about transferring to a four-year university
- Explore graduate school and other educational pathways
- Connect with mentors, scientists, and other professionals
- Expand my network and build new relationships
- Discover scholarships, internships, funding, and other opportunities
- Develop professional, communication, and leadership skills
- Find community with other students and SACNAS members
- Learn something new that I can bring back to my campus



Before You Go Checklist

- **Update your resume or CV**
- Upload your resume or CV to the **conference registration platform**.
 - Follow [this step-by-step guide](#) for more information on how to complete this.
- Join the official **2026 SACNAS Annual Conference Slack Channel** (invitation will be provided to you via email).
- Connecting with professionals at the SACNAS Annual Conference is critical to making the most out of your experience at the conference! **Read this resource for tips on how to [network with professionals](#) at the SACNAS Annual Conference.**
- **Prepare an elevator pitch.** Use [this resource](#) for tips on how to complete this step.
- **Learn [How to Identify Mentors in Your Scientific Journey](#)**
- Arriving at the conference with a goal (or goals) in mind will help you leverage your experience at the SACNAS Annual Conference and give you something to share with the professionals and mentors you may be networking with! Use [this resource](#) to learn how to create **SMART goals**!
- Learn what it means to **Bring Your Whole Self to the Conference**!
 - Watch our video resource [here](#)!
- [Review the agenda](#) leading up to the conference and **identify priority sessions based on your goals.**
- **Identify five people, organizations, employers, or funders you would like to meet.**
- [Create a digital business card](#) or bring physical copies.

SECOND STOP: Choose Your Conference Path

Build your conference experience around what matters most to you! Use your goals and interests to create a schedule that supports what you hope to gain from the SACNAS Annual

Conference. Explore the suggested events, pathways and sessions to find opportunities that align with your research and career interests, professional development, and next steps.

If your goal is...	Look for these sessions or events...
Explore STEM fields and careers	Scientific talks, research presentations, STEM symposia, career panels, and conversations with professionals from different disciplines
Explore transferring to a four-year university	Academic exhibitors, university representatives, faculty conversations, transfer resources, and student networking opportunities
Explore graduate school	Graduate school panels, conversations with faculty and graduate students, academic exhibitors, and research-focused sessions
Discover research opportunities	Research presentations, scientific talks, conversations with researchers, and information about internships, summer research programs, and other opportunities
Explore career opportunities	Career panels, Academic & Career Expo Hall conversations, professional development sessions, and networking with STEM employers
Connect with mentors	The 1-on-1 Mentoring Workshop, Conversations with Scientists, mentoring activities, and sessions featuring professionals whose experiences interest you
Build professional skills	Workshops focused on communication, networking, leadership, career preparation, and other transferable skills
Expand my network	Networking events, receptions, student gatherings, research presentations, and opportunities to connect with students and professionals
Find my community	SACNAS community events, student gatherings, mentoring activities, networking opportunities, and the SACNAS Powwow & Pachanga
Explore new areas of STEM	Interdisciplinary sessions, scientific talks, research presentations, and conversations with researchers outside your current areas of interest

Remember: You don't need to have your future figured out to make the most of this conference. Stay curious, ask questions, and give yourself permission to explore something new. A single conversation or new connection could help you discover a path you hadn't considered before!

Conference Session Highlights

**Please note, session times are subject to change.*

Wednesday, October 28

7:30 – 9:00 PM PT Student Presenters Welcome & Coaching Session: This fun and interactive session is designed to help student presenters make the most of their 2026 SACNAS experience. The session will include a conference orientation, networking activities, and an opportunity for students to practice their presentations and receive feedback. It is especially designed to support novice presenters in developing

effective presentation skills and building confidence. Professionals and senior students from all disciplines are invited to serve as “coaches,” offering positive and constructive feedback, helpful tips, and encouragement to presenters during the session.

Thursday, October 29

10:30 AM – 12:30 PM PT Research Poster Presentations: Selected students present their scientific research to their peers, mentor judges, and other conference participants for professional growth and networking for advancement in their academic careers.

12:30 – 1:45 PM PT Conversations with Scientists: Representing the spectrum of science disciplines, all professional attendees are invited to dine with student attendees and engage in informal round-table discussions about discipline-specific careers. The personal connections made at CwS set the stage for ongoing mentorship and support throughout the conference.

2:00 – 3:15 PM PT Choosing a Research Mentor: Strategies for Finding Fit, Alignment, and Support: Effective mentoring is critical for academic advancement and is associated with increased productivity, research independence, and career satisfaction. However, trainees are rarely taught how to intentionally evaluate and select a research mentor. In this interactive workshop, participants will reflect on the attributes and values they seek in a mentoring relationship and learn strategies to align those priorities with potential mentors and lab environments. Through guided reflection and discussion, participants will explore key factors in selecting a research mentor, including navigating uncertainty and managing conflicting feelings during the decision-making process. This session is designed to support trainees in making informed, thoughtful decisions that align with both their personal values and professional goals.

2:00 – 3:15 PM PT Oh, the Places You'll Go: Decoding Graduate School - What, Where, When, Why, and How to Apply: Our session is aimed at empowering students who are interested in graduate studies but are unsure what graduate school really is and how to best prepare for the graduate process. We essentially will be diving into the What, Where, When, Why, and How's of graduate school. We will begin with an interactive “WordCloud” session where we get the audience's take on the following questions: 1) What does graduate school even mean? and 2) Why are you interested in pursuing graduate studies? We will discuss these questions respectively as they are the foundation of this workshop's success. Applying for graduate school is not only a fairly daunting process but also a commitment that takes time and attention. By addressing these two questions, students will have a better understanding of what graduate school really entails (Master's vs PhD vs Post-Bac programs, etc.) and what doors it can open, as well as develop a personal mantra on why they want to pursue graduate studies. This mantra is something every graduate student needs for motivation throughout their journey and is a reminder to reflect on along the way. We simply want to help future researchers pursue their higher academia passions by providing a space where their questions can be answered and their concerns can be addressed. We hope that our panel will help attendees be confident in their applications, be confident with their identity as a researcher, and be confident that they can and will succeed.

5:30 – 7:00 PM PT 1-on-1 Mentoring with a SACNAS Leader: Get Advice from Faculty and STEM Mentors on Planning for your Science Career: The 1-on-1 Mentoring workshop matches students with mentors to discuss career goals and provides them space and time to visit, engage and share within a 90-minute time period. [Mentee Sign-up Form](#)

6:30 – 8:30 PM PT Networking Receptions (Various): Black, Afro-Latinx and Afro-Indigenous Reception, Native American and Indigenous Community Reception, LGBTQIA+ Reception, Women in STEM Reception

Friday, October 30

10:30 AM – 12:30 PM PT Research Poster Presentations: Selected students present their scientific research to their peers, mentor judges, and other conference participants for professional growth and networking for advancement in their academic careers.

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM PT Graduate Student Oral Presentations: Selected graduate students present their scientific research to their peers, mentors, and other conference participants for professional growth and networking.

4:00 – 5:15 PM PT From First Generation to STEM Leaders: Building Communities That Last: What does it take to be the first? This panel explores the challenges, resilience, and determination of first generation STEM professionals whose families trace their roots to El Salvador, a small country in Central America. Each panelist has navigated unfamiliar spaces, overcome obstacles, and forged a unique path in academia, industry, engineering, marine science, and biomedical research. Through honest conversations and personal stories, we hope to show attendees that they are not alone. We will share the lessons we have learned, the setbacks we faced, and the communities that helped us succeed. Our goal is to inspire others to believe that they, too, belong in STEM and can create opportunities for themselves regardless of where they come from or the challenges they face. Whether you are the first in your family to pursue higher education, beginning your STEM journey, or searching for mentors and community, this session will leave you with practical advice, encouragement, and the confidence to pursue your goals while helping pave the way for those who come after you.

Saturday, October 31

10:30 AM – 2:30 PM PT Community College Day: During this event, community college students will network with partners at the resource fair, learn new skills, and choose from workshop topics for a day of inspiration and opportunity! Sign-ups are now closed. *Please note, this is an invite-only event.*

10:30 – 11:45 AM PT How to Identify the Right Mentor for You: Navigating a scientific career can be both exciting and challenging, and mentorship plays a critical role in professional and personal development. This session will provide attendees with practical strategies for identifying, developing, and maintaining effective mentoring relationships throughout their careers. Led by postdoctoral fellows and early-career scientists who are alumni of the 2023 and 2024 SACNAS Postdoc Leadership Institute cohorts, this panel will draw upon diverse experiences in research, leadership, and mentorship. Panelists will share lessons learned from their own career journeys and discuss how mentorship needs evolve across different career stages. Through interactive discussion and real-world examples, participants will gain a deeper understanding of the value of mentorship in academia, research, and leadership. Attendees will engage in self-reflection to assess their career goals, strengths, and areas where mentorship may be most beneficial. The session will explore key factors to consider when selecting mentors, approaches for initiating mentor-mentee relationships, and strategies for effectively communicating expectations and goals. Participants will also learn how to identify mentorship opportunities through professional societies such as SACNAS, networking events, and other career-development resources. In addition, the panel will discuss the characteristics of successful mentor-mentee relationships, including goal setting, feedback, boundary setting, and conflict resolution. The session will emphasize the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in mentorship and provide strategies for fostering supportive and inclusive mentoring environments. By the end of the session, attendees will be equipped with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to build meaningful mentoring relationships that support long-term scientific and leadership success.

1:15 – 2:30 PM PT From First Generation to STEM Leaders: Building Communities That Last: What does it take to be the first? This panel explores the challenges, resilience, and determination of first-generation STEM professionals whose families trace their roots to El Salvador, a small country in Central America. Each panelist has navigated unfamiliar spaces, overcome obstacles, and forged a unique path in academia, industry, engineering, marine science, and biomedical research. Through honest conversations and personal stories, we hope to show attendees that they are not alone. We will share the lessons we have learned, the setbacks we faced, and the communities that helped us succeed. Our goal is to inspire others to believe that they, too, belong in STEM and can create opportunities for themselves regardless of where they come from or the challenges they face. Whether you are the first in your family to pursue higher education, beginning your STEM journey, or searching for mentors and community, this session will leave you with practical advice, encouragement, and the confidence to pursue your goals while helping pave the way for those who come after you.

3:00 – 4:45 PM PT Award Ceremony & Closing Plenary: Keynote address by Dr. Alberto "Beto" Vasquez, Ed.D. (Yaqui (Sonora) & Mayo (Sinaloa)), Director of Early Academic Outreach Program & Director of CSSI STEM Engagement & Community Outreach at UC San Diego, followed by a celebration of the hard work of our student research presenters!

Daily Plenary Sessions, Daily Academic and Career Expo Hall, and so much more!

THIRD STOP: Prepare Your Conference Toolkit

Be ready to introduce yourself, explore your interests, and start meaningful conversations!

The SACNAS Annual Conference is a great opportunity to meet scientists, professionals, mentors, and fellow students. Preparing a few simple tools ahead of time can help you feel more confident connecting with others and exploring new possibilities.

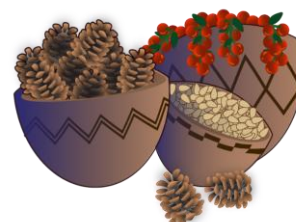
- **Prepare a brief introduction.** Practice sharing your name, college, interest, and what you hope to learn or explore at the conference.
- **Practice talking about your interests.** Be ready to share what excites you about STEM, a class or project you've enjoyed, a problem you'd like to solve, or a field you'd like to explore. You don't need research experience to have a great conversation!
- **Bring an updated resume.** Have a copy available if you're interested in internships, research opportunities, transferring to a four-year university, or exploring future careers.
- **Prepare a way to stay connected.** Consider creating a digital business card or updating your professional profile so new connections can easily keep in touch.
- **Come with a few questions.** Think of questions you can ask scientists, professionals, college representatives, graduate students, and potential mentors.
- **Know what you hope to gain.** Identify the people you'd like to meet, opportunities you want to explore, and skills or knowledge you hope to take away from the conference.

FOURTH STOP: Make Connections with Intention

The 5-Connection Challenge

Before leaving the SACNAS Annual Conference, connect with:

- 1 fellow student
- 1 scientist or STEM professional



- 1 potential mentor
- 1 person on a path you're curious about
- 1 person outside your current area of interest

Go beyond collecting contacts: Ask, "Would you be open to staying connected after the conference?" Make a quick note about what you discussed so your follow-up can be personal and specific. Remember the tips included in the [Networking with Professionals](#) resource!

FIFTH STOP: Explore the Academic & Career Expo

Discover opportunities and explore what's possible for your future! Whether you're considering transferring to a four-year university, looking for internships or research experiences, exploring STEM careers, or simply curious about what comes next, the Academic & Career Expo is a great place to start.

Use the Expo Hall to meet university representatives, employers, and other organizations; learn about opportunities; and discover the skills and experiences that can help you reach your goals. You don't need to have a specific career in mind to benefit. Come curious and ask questions! **PRO TIP:** *Be on the lookout for any exhibitors/booths that have a ribbon that says, "We ♥ Community College Students"*

Questions to Ask

- What opportunities are available for community college students interested in STEM?
- Do you offer internships, summer programs, research experiences, or other opportunities for students at my stage?
- What pathways are available for students interested in transferring to a four-year university?
- What skills or experiences would help me prepare for opportunities in this field?
- What do you enjoy most about your work or the work your organization does?
- What advice would you give a student who is just beginning to explore this field?
- Are there scholarships, funding opportunities, or other resources I should know about?
- Who else or what other programs would you recommend I connect with?

Goal: Leave the Academic & Career Expo with new information, meaningful connections, and ideas for your next steps, not simply a collection of brochures or business cards!

FINAL STOP: Turn the SACNAS Annual Conference into Action

Your 30-Day Post-Conference Plan

Your SACNAS Annual Conference experience doesn't have to end when you leave Long Beach! Take a few intentional steps after the conference to build on the connections you made, follow up on opportunities you discovered, and put what you learned into practice.

Within 48 hours: Reach out to one or two people you connected with. Thank them for their time and mention something specific you discussed.

Within 1 week: Connect with new contacts on LinkedIn or through another appropriate channel. Share any resources you promised and organize the information you collected.

Within 2 weeks: Arrange an informational conversation with a professional, mentor, university representative, or someone whose educational or career path interests you.

Within 30 days: Take one concrete action inspired by your conference experience. You could explore a transfer pathway, apply for an internship or scholarship, research a summer program, reach out to a potential mentor, or learn more about a STEM field that caught your attention.

One person I will follow up with: _____

One opportunity I will explore: _____

One action I will take in the next 30 days: _____

One thing I learned about myself or my future in STEM: _____

The SACNAS Annual Conference Doesn't End Here!

Keep your SACNAS journey going beyond the Annual Conference! The connections, insights, and experiences you gain are just the beginning. Stay engaged with the SACNAS community throughout the year to continue building relationships, exploring opportunities, and discovering your place in STEM.

- Stay connected with the students, professionals, and mentors you meet.
- Keep learning and exploring new STEM topics, strengthen your skills, and stay curious.
- Explore opportunities to get involved with SACNAS.
- Take your next step and turn what inspired you at the conference into action, no matter how small.
- Keep building your community!

