



# NAC Press Release

For immediate release  
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## Six Students Selected for Prestigious Academy Scholarships!

Austin, TX — The National Academy of Construction (NAC) is pleased to announce the awarding of six prestigious NAC scholarships to exceptional students for the upcoming 2025-26 academic year. This marks the sixth year of the NAC Scholarship Program, demonstrating the Academy's ongoing commitment to fostering the next generation of leaders in the construction industry. The program will distribute a total of \$60,000 to the deserving recipients.

"I am inspired by the work the National Academy of Construction does to elevate the field and support future leaders. I look forward to making the most of this opportunity and hope to one day give back in the same way that you have given to me," said one of this year's recipients.

"The NAC Scholarship Committee completed the challenging but rewarding task of reviewing the applicants this year. We follow a rigorous evaluation process, and each year it gets a bit harder to select the awardees," said Mike Garvin, chair of the committee. "The quality of the applicants from across the country is very impressive. I want to thank all members of the committee for their dedication and service."

"Having been involved in the scholarship program at NAC since its inception, I believe that this is the strongest group of applicants we have received. I want to thank all the NAC members who have written letters of recommendations for the candidates, and also thanks to the great work of the Scholarship Committee in performing a very difficult task of selecting these six among the 26 applicants," says Edd Gibson, NAC President/CEO.

### The 2025 NAC Scholarship Recipients:

**Catherine Caputo**, recently recognized as the 2025 Construction Engineering and Management Outstanding Senior at Virginia Tech, has been awarded an NAC scholarship. Her exceptional leadership, strong academic record, and commitment to service have earned her this distinction. Catherine's achievements include leading the award-winning ASC Design-Build Competition Team to first place in Dallas and second in Dublin, active participation in the ASC Heavy Civil Team, and contributions to research culminating in an international publication and presentation in France. A veteran of three construction internships and a teaching assistantship, she has also served as a Co-Lead Student Ambassador, participated in the Fralin Undergraduate Research Fellowship, led mission trips to Peru, and directed campus



Bible studies. Catherine will continue her academic journey at Virginia Tech, pursuing a master's degree in the Vecellio Construction Engineering and Management Program, where she aims to conduct impactful research and further her passion for global service within the construction field.

**Morgan Dawkins**, a rising junior in Penn State University's Architectural Engineering program, has been awarded the Wayne A. Crew NAC scholarship. An accelerated student in the five-year integrated bachelor's and master's program (construction option), Morgan is a Schreyer Honors Scholar and Presidential Scholar in the Presidential Leadership Academy, demonstrating a strong commitment to innovation and sustainability. Her industry experience includes internships with Whiting-Turner and Smithson Inc. In addition to her academic pursuits, Morgan serves as Treasurer for Penn State's NSBE chapter and End Zone Coordinator for NSBE Region II. She also works as a Program Assistant for the First-Year in Science and Engineering (FISE) program, mentoring first-year students. Morgan is passionate about promoting resilient and community-centered building practices.



**Ellie Howard**, a senior at Brigham Young University (BYU) studying Construction Management with a Business minor, has been honored with an NAC scholarship. With three internships completed at McCarthy Building Companies, Inc. in Las Vegas, she is currently contributing to the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino renovation. At BYU, Ellie served as President of the Construction Management Student Association, co-founded the Ethics in Construction Club, and actively participates in the ASC Commercial Competition, serving as team captain this year. She is also a member of Sigma Lambda Chi and a Teaching Assistant for several Construction Management courses. Her research on sustainable building methods in low-income communities, conducted during a study abroad in the Dominican Republic, reflects her commitment to impactful construction practices. Upon graduation, Ellie aims to contribute to the commercial construction sector, with a focus on expanding opportunities for women and supporting young professionals in the trades.



**Elissa Irwanto**, a master's degree candidate in Sustainable Design and Construction at Stanford University, has been named a recipient of a NAC scholarship. A Miami native, Elissa holds a bachelor's degree in Sustainability and the Built Environment and an Artificial Intelligence certification from the University of Florida. Her passion for climate equity and inclusive urban design stems from her experiences with aging infrastructure and environmental disparities in Miami. At UF, she served as a Diversity Ambassador, promoting AEC careers to underrepresented students. At Stanford, Elissa is the Vice President and BuildIt liaison for Leaders of the Built Environment, connecting students with industry advancements in sustainability and construction. This summer, she will intern with Trane



Technologies as an energy engineer, focusing on building electrification. Her previous internship was with Arup in sustainable engineering and construction. Elissa is dedicated to bridging sustainability design with social equity and aims for a career in energy consulting, helping marginalized communities achieve decarbonization and climate resilience in their buildings.

**Matthew Ross**, a fourth-year student at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering with a Structural Engineering specialization and minors in Computer Science and Business, has been awarded the Paul F. Boulos NAC scholarship. At Illinois, Matthew serves as President of the Illinois Men’s Rowing Club, an Engineering Learning Assistant, and an Undergraduate Research Assistant. His practical experience includes internships in project management and design at HBK Engineering, Clark Construction Group, and SpaceX. Matthew is a distinguished recipient of the Ira O. Baker Award and the A. Epstein Award in Civil Engineering, recognizing top academic achievement. Following graduation, he will pursue a Master of Science in Structural Engineering & Mechanics at Stanford University.



**Freddie Smith**, pursuing both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in civil engineering at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, has been recognized with an NAC scholarship. Immersed in heavy construction from a young age through his family's involvement with Worcester Sand and FT Smith Sand and Gravel, Freddie developed a deep appreciation for the industry's practical challenges. This early exposure inspired his academic focus on structural design and project implementation. Dedicated to gaining hands-on experience, he will serve as a Geotechnical Engineering Intern at GEI Consultants this summer. Freddie’s academic excellence and leadership potential are evident through his induction into Chi Epsilon and Tau Beta Pi honor societies. He is also actively involved in his university's ASCE Chapter's Steel Bridge Team, which is heading to Nationals for the first time in over a decade, and will serve as co-captain for next year’s design team as they prepare for the national competition hosted by AISC.



The Scholarship Committee for 2026 is made up of Mike Garvin, Chair, Andy Ciancia, Vice Chair, and members Burcu Akinci, Wayne Crew, Anne Ellis, Evelyn Fujimoto, Tim Green, Mark Hastak, Pat Natale, Mike Rigsby, Sarah Slaughter, Jill Tietjen, Kumar Topudurti, Hans Van Winkle, and Dan Whiteman. The NAC scholarship program is in its sixth year and has awarded 54 scholarships worth \$229k.

*The National Academy of Construction, established in 1999, is an organization of industry leaders—construction users, constructors, engineers, architects, consultants, attorneys, sureties, editors, and academics—who have made outstanding, life-long contributions to the construction industry. In addition to honoring the personal contributions of its members, the Academy provides its leadership and expertise to a variety of organizations, governmental and nongovernmental, for the betterment of the industry and nation, fostering collaboration, future improvement, and building the next generation of leaders.*

*For more information on this release, contact the NAC Office at [NAC@UTexas.edu](mailto:NAC@UTexas.edu).*

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