



MAY 2026 NEWSLETTER

Dear AWIS Houston Members,

Spring is in full swing, and so is AWIS Houston! We have an exciting month ahead packed with professional development, community highlights, and opportunities to get more involved. Read on for all the details!

UPCOMING EVENT

Virtual Fireside Chat — June 5, 2026, at 12pm CST

AWIS HOUSTON VIRTUAL FIRESIDE CHAT

From Bench to Balance:

A Candid Career Conversation with Dr. Nicole Scheff

Dr. Nicole Scheff, interviewed by AWIS Houston President Dr. Liz Hileman

DATE Friday, June 5, 2026	TIME 12:00 – 1:00 PM CST
FORMAT Virtual — Zoom	COST Free & open to all

REGISTER HERE: forms.gle/RbJwhRosQKu8zx1Q6

Have a question for Dr. Scheff? Submit questions ahead of time through the [registration form](#), or ask questions live during the session. Once registered, you'll receive the Zoom link directly. Feel free to share with colleagues and labmates!

Join us for an open, honest conversation with **Dr. Nicole Scheff**, Assistant Professor in the Department of Neurobiology at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and Principal Investigator at the UPMC Hillman Cancer Center.

After earning her PhD from Pitt's Center for Neuroscience and completing a postdoctoral fellowship in oral cancer pain research at NYU College of Dentistry, Dr. Scheff was awarded a prestigious NIH K99/R00 career development award and launched her independent lab in 2020. Her research is uncovering something remarkable: the deep connections between nerves and cancer.

AWIS Houston President Dr. Liz Hileman will sit down with Dr. Scheff to explore the real story behind her journey. Topics will include:

- Navigating the transition from trainee to independent investigator
- What work-life balance actually looks like in an academic lab setting
- Lessons learned from postdoctoral training and the K99 experience
- Advice for women building careers in research and STEM

Whether you're a graduate student, postdoc, early-career faculty member, or someone figuring out how to pursue ambitious work without losing yourself along the way, this conversation is for you.

Advancing women in science, together.

awishouston.org | [LinkedIn](#) | © 2026 AWIS Houston Chapter

MEMBER RECOGNITION

Announcing Our 2026 OWIS Awardee

We are thrilled to announce that **Dr. Vasanthi Jayaraman** has been selected as AWIS Houston's 2026 **Outstanding Woman in Science (OWIS)** awardee! The OWIS award recognizes a Houston-area woman whose contributions to science, mentorship, and advocacy have made a lasting impact on our community and this year, that woman is Dr. Jayaraman!



Vasanthi Jayaraman, PhD

Chair & Professor

Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
John S. Dunn Chair in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
Co-Director, Center for Membrane Biology
McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston

Dr. Jayaraman is an internationally recognized leader in biophysics and molecular biology. Her research focuses on the structure and function of membrane proteins, with an emphasis on ligand-gated ion channels such as glutamate receptors, advancing our understanding of molecular signaling in the brain. Her work has been continuously supported by the National Institutes of Health.

She earned her Bachelor of Science from Madras University and her Master of Science from the Indian Institute of Technology in Madras, India, before earning her doctorate from **Princeton University** in 1995. She completed her postdoctoral training at Cornell University, then joined the faculty at Marquette University before coming to UTHealth Houston in 2002, where she rose to full professor in 2012.

Most recently, following a national search, Dr. Jayaraman was named **Chair of the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology** at McGovern Medical School, effective May 1, 2026. She also holds the Bob and Hazel Casey Chair in Biochemistry and has served as vice chair for research. Her honors include the **2025 President's Scholar Award**, designation as a **Biophysical Society Fellow**, and fellowship in the **American Association for the Advancement of Science**. Beyond her research, Dr. Jayaraman is a deeply committed mentor.

Her former student and nominator, Dr. Kimberly Mankiewicz, has known her since her undergraduate years and completed her PhD under Dr. Jayaraman's mentorship at UTHealth Houston. Dr. Mankiewicz wrote:

"Without Vasanthi's mentorship, I wouldn't be where I am today. She is known among trainees, especially women, as an approachable mentor even if she's not your student. She knows how to direct her students to best use their scientific skills, and she taught me how to stand firm and get things done while still being kind and collaborative."

We will celebrate Dr. Jayaraman with an in-person recognition event this summer. Details to follow!

Please join us in congratulating Dr. Jayaraman on this well-deserved honor!

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Annalise “Annie” Rickman



***Manager,
Advanced Manufacturing Engineering
LivaNova***

“Rocketry, Resilience, and the Remarkable Career of a Woman in Medtech Engineering”

Some people stumble into engineering, but Annie Rickman was practically born into it! Growing up watching her father work at NASA and launching model rockets as a kid, Annie’s fascination with how things work took root early, leading her to pursue a degree in Mechanical Engineering from Louisiana State University.

Annie began her career at **LivaNova**, a medtech company at the forefront of neuromodulation, developing implantable devices that treat conditions including epilepsy, sleep apnea, and depression.

Her talent and leadership quickly became evident. Annie has since been promoted to **Manager of Advanced Manufacturing Engineering**, where she leads new product introduction (NPI) efforts, bridging the gap between innovation and production. Not one to stop learning, she is also pursuing a Master’s degree in Computer Science at the University of Colorado Boulder. Annie’s story is a reminder that the best engineers never stop being curious.

Fun facts about Annie!

Annie is a licensed pilot and long-distance runner, has travelled to Antarctica, and has summited Mount Kilimanjaro. If there’s a challenge involved, she’s interested!

We are so proud to have her in the AWIS Houston community!

Want to be featured in a future Member Spotlight? We would love to celebrate you!

[*AWIS Houston Member Spotlight Nominations*](#)

GET INVOLVED

Join the AWIS Houston Board: Applications Now Open

Are you passionate about advancing women in science and looking for a way to make a deeper impact? AWIS Houston is currently seeking dedicated members to join our Board of Directors!

Who Should Apply

- Active AWIS Houston member for at least 3 months & committed to advancing women in science and STEM
- Willing to take the time to collaboratively work with other board members on a regular basis
- Enthusiastic about leadership, programming, and community building

Apply here: forms.gle/9jX5uh1jy3kQUja97

Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis, so don't wait to submit! If you have questions about board roles or would like to learn more before applying, please reach out to any current board member.

From AWIS National

For upcoming webinars and recordings of past events, check out this AWIS Nationals page <https://awis.org/whats-next-webinars/>

Encourage your friends and colleagues to join: www.awis.org/join

New Career Center

You may have noticed a new look to the AWIS career center. This is because AWIS National has identified a better way for job seekers AND potential employers to match up with one another! This new platform **utilizes “Skills-Based” searching** and whether you are just starting your journey, outgrown your current role, or looking for a new challenge, the new AWIS Career Center can help!

What do we mean by skills-based? The system will match the technical STEM skills that you possess with the required and desired skills of an employer's job posting. Our growing taxonomy includes over 8000 technical STEM skills. **Other platforms don't offer this level of specificity when it comes to technical STEM skills.** In addition, the smart algorithm has been programmed to understand the nuances in the STEM taxonomy. For example, if your resume lists “Western Blot” or “ELISA,” the algorithm knows those are biochemical assays and would include relevant roles in your search results.

The new skills-based algorithm was **NIH-awarded for reducing bias in hiring**. When employers search for candidates with a certain degree or specific job experience, they narrow their search too much and miss out on qualified candidates. By focusing on the required skills, all qualified candidates are included. We also recognize that many women feel they need to [tick every box](#) of a job description before they will apply. The algorithm takes this into consideration and recommends roles based on a percentage of the required and preferred skills that you possess.

Start exploring the new AWIS Career Center today and take the first step towards achieving your professional goals!!

<https://awis.org/awis-career-center/>