

Computer Science

FROM THE CHAIR / Spring 2026

Dear colleagues, alumni, and friends,

Spring brings momentum, and with it, new ideas and possibilities—perhaps none more exciting than the launch of our new **undergraduate major in AI**. Designed to bridge the gap between academic computer science and applied AI, the AI major will equip students with a deep, practical understanding of how intelligent systems are built, deployed, and used responsibly. We look forward to our first class starting this fall.

In addition, we are excited to welcome members of the new Northwestern Computer Science **Advisory Board** to further the collaboration, creativity, and curiosity that define our department. We appreciate the guidance and partnership of members Bill Bliss, Tania Neild, Stephen Pratt, Prabhakar Raghavan, Shriram Revankar, Francesca Rossi, Valerie Taylor, Manuela M. Veloso, and Todd Warren.

Whether you're on campus every day or engaging with us from afar, I hope this newsletter leaves you feeling informed, inspired, and proud of what we're building together. **Stay in touch** and be part of what comes next. Thank you for all the ways you contribute to our community.

Sincerely,



Samir Khuller

Peter and Adrienne Barris Chair and Professor
Department of Computer Science
McCormick School of Engineering



Northwestern Engineering Announces New AI Major

The first major program in the new Northwestern Engineering bachelor of science in engineering degree, the AI major will launch in fall 2026.



Professor Sara Sood Receives the Linzer Award for Faculty Service

Sood was one of four Northwestern faculty members recognized for extraordinary service to the institution and University community members.



Bain and Vijayaraghavan Honored with 2026 University Teaching Awards

Northwestern Engineering's **Connor Bain** and **Aravindan Vijayaraghavan** are among the seven Northwestern faculty members honored with 2026 University Teaching Awards. The annual recognition is given to professors who demonstrate excellence and innovation in undergraduate teaching.



Hardavellas and dos Reis Named Awardees of National Quantum Algorithm Center Grand Challenges Program

Among the five National Quantum Algorithm Center Grand Challenges awardees, Northwestern Engineering's **Nikos Hardavellas** and **Roberto dos Reis** will collaborate with IBM and Abbvie on "A Hamiltonian Simulation Compiler for Drug Design and Materials Discovery." The project focuses on democratizing access to quantum systems for simulating molecular interactions relevant to drug discovery and materials design.



Cracking the Code: Preparing Students for an AI-Driven Future

Northwestern Computer Science faculty strike a balance between mastering core skills and leveraging generative AI in CS education.



Federal Judges Report Broad Adoption of AI Tools

In a new survey led by Professors **Daniel Linna** and **V.S. Subrahmanian**, more than half of responding judges report using at least one AI tool in their judicial work.



Evolved Robots Are Born to Run and Refuse to Die

Developed by Professor **Sam Kriegman**, AI-designed metamachines can run in the wild, recover from damage, and transform into new shapes.

Department News

Professor **Sidhanth Mohanty** and a multi-institution team won the **Best Paper Award** at the 66th Annual Symposium on Foundations of Computer Science.

A multi-institution team led by PhD student **Canyu Chen** earned **two awards** at Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI) workshops.

Shraeya Iyer, Xi-Aan Loh, and Nalin (Fai) Pongpeth received **honorable mentions** in the Computer Research Association (CRA) 2026 Outstanding Undergraduate Researcher Award competition.

A Computer Science and Learning Sciences team including PhD students **Caryn Tran** and **Kristin Fasiang** and Professor **Eleanor O'Rourke** earned a **Best Paper Award** at the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Special Interest Group on Computer-Human Interaction (SIGCHI) Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI'26).

Alum **Yifan Wu** (PhD '25) received an **Honorable Mention** for the ACM Special Interest Group on Economics and Computation (SIGecom) 2025 Doctoral Dissertation Award.

PhD student **Kexin Zhao** earned the **Patrick Henry Winston Best Student Paper Award** at the 2025 Conference on Advances in Cognitive Systems (ACS).

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