



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 22 August 2025

Media Contact: Teri Chouinard, SPE ACCE MarCom Chair, 248.701.8003,

intuitgroup@gmail.com

SPE® ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF ACCE & REHKOPF SCHOLARSHIPS TO BE HONORED AT AUTOMOTIVE COMPOSITES CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION (ACCE) SEPT. 3 – 5, 2025

TROY (DETROIT) MICH.- The organizing committee for the SPE Automotive Composites Conference & Exhibition (ACCE) today announced the winners of the group's annual SPE ACCE scholarships and the Dr. Jackie Rehkopf scholarships from a fund that has been set up to honor the long-time SPE ACCE committee member, SPE Automotive Division board member, and automotive composites researcher. SPE ACCE and Rehkopf scholarship winners will be honored at the SPE ACCE, Sept. 3 - 5, 2025 at the Suburban Collection Showplace in Novi, Mich., USA. ACCE scholarship winners will plan to present the results of their research at next year's SPE ACCE event. Rehkopf scholarship winners will present the results of their research at next year's SPE ACCE or publish them in an SPE journal. Both scholarships are administered as part of the SPE Foundation (www.4spe.org).

The ACCE Scholarships (a total of \$8,000 USD) are sponsored by the SPE Automotive and SPE Composites Divisions. Five ACCE Scholarships (\$500 - \$2,000 USD each) are awarded to students pursuing advanced studies in a composites-related field. The five winners of the SPE ACCE scholarships are **Akash Padatara**, a PhD Student in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, TN (<https://research.utk.edu/iamm/>) awarded \$2,000; **Kunle Adeyemo**, a Dual-Degree PhD Student in the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering and the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Michigan State University in East

Lansing, MI (<https://engineering.msu.edu/about/departments/cee>) awarded \$2,000; **Eonyeon Jo**, a PhD student in Sustainable and Advanced Composite Material Manufacturing at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in Knoxville, TN (<https://research.utk.edu/iamm/>) awarded \$2,000; **Malik Hassan**, a PhD student in Biological Engineering at the University of Guelph, in Guelph, Ontario (<https://www.uoguelph.ca/programs/biological-engineering/>) awarded \$1,000; and **Jocelyn Hess**, an Undergraduate Student in Materials Science & Engineering at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in Knoxville, TN (<https://research.utk.edu/iamm/>) was also awarded \$1,000.

The Dr. Jackie Rehkopf Scholarships (a total of \$5,000) are sponsored by the SPE Automotive Division, the SPE Composites Division and the generous donations of friends and family. Three winners selected this year for the Rehkopf Scholarship are **Kendra Allen**, a PhD Student in Energy Science and Engineering at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in Knoxville, TN (<https://bredesencenter.utk.edu/energy-science/>) awarded \$2,000; **Clara Kramer**, a PhD Student in Chemical and Biological Engineering at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, BC (<https://chbe.ubc.ca/>) awarded \$1,500; and **Gabriela Meriano**, a PhD Student in Materials Science and Engineering at Baylor University in Waco, TX (<https://graduate.baylor.edu/materialsphd>) also awarded \$1,500.



Akash Phadatore
PhD Candidate, Mechanical Engineering
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
2025 ACCE Scholar

Akash Phadatore is a PhD Student in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, TN, USA. He works under the guidance of Dr. Uday Vaidya at the Fibers and Composite Manufacturing Facility (UTK) and the Manufacturing Demonstration Facility at ORNL,

USA. His primary research areas include joining, additive manufacturing, filament winding, and fiber sizing.



Kunle Adeyamo

Dual-degree PhD Candidate, Civil & Environmental Engineering and Mechanical Engineering

Michigan State University

2025 ACCE Scholar

Kunle Kazeem Adeyemo is a third-year dual-degree doctoral student in the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering and the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Michigan State University. His research focuses multi-scale analysis of progressive failure in dissimilar material (metal and composite) hybrid fastening systems, this analysis is crucial for light-weighting in both aerospace and automotive industries, particularly in the design of complex parts for future electric vehicles.



Eonyeon Jo

PhD Candidate, Sustainable and Advanced Composite Material Manufacturing

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

2025 ACCE Scholar

Eonyeon Jo is a PhD candidate at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, specializing in sustainable and advanced composite material manufacturing. Research focuses on improving energy efficiency in large-scale polymer additive manufacturing using advanced simulation and machine learning. Key areas include thermal-mechanical modeling, process parameter optimization with machine learning and life cycle assessment.



Malik Hassan

PhD Candidate, Biological Engineering

University of Guelph

2025 ACCE Scholar

Malik Hassan is a PhD researcher in Biological Engineering at the University of Guelph, specializing in sustainable composites for automotive applications. His research focuses on the 3D printing of recycled polymers and biocarbon fillers to create lightweight, high-performance materials that support circular economy principles. With a background in mechanical engineering and a distinguished academic record, including a Gold Medal and multiple research awards, Malik bridges materials science and advanced manufacturing. He has published in leading peer-reviewed journals and presented at major international conferences. Malik currently serves as President of the Graduate Engineering Student Society at the University of Guelph, advancing innovation in sustainable mobility solutions.



Jocelyn Hess

Undergraduate Student, Materials Science & Engineering

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

2025 ACCE Scholar

Jocelyn Hess is an upcoming senior studying materials science and engineering and minoring in leadership at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She currently does research at the Center for Renewable Carbon, studying polymer-paper fiber composites for automobiles in collaboration with Volkswagen. She is heavily involved as the Travel Chair of her university's Material Advantage club and as a mentor for the Society of Women Engineers. She plans to continue her studies in graduate school with the eventual goal of becoming a research professor.



Kendra Allen

PhD Candidate, Energy Science and Engineering

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

2025 Rehkopf Scholar

Kendra Allen is a PhD candidate in Energy Science and Engineering at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and a research assistant at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. Her research focuses on crystallization dynamics in carbon fiber-reinforced thermoplastic composites to enhance performance and sustainability in advanced materials. She holds an M.S. in Agricultural and Biological Systems Engineering from Iowa State University and a B.S. in Biological Systems Engineering from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Kendra has experience in materials science, process optimization, and project management, and has contributed to research, nonprofit leadership, and professional development initiatives throughout her academic and professional journey.



Clara Kramer

PhD Candidate, Chemical & Biological Engineering

University of British Columbia

2025 Rehkopf Scholar

Clara Kramer is a PhD student in Chemical and Biological Engineering at the University of British Columbia. She studies how cellulose nanocrystals (CNCs) can act as nucleating agents and percolated reinforcing networks in biopolymers to enhance performance and processing. Her work combines thermal, mechanical, and in-situ structural characterization to understand CNC–polymer interactions. She is also exploring surface modification of CNCs to enable crosslinking and further improve material properties. Clara holds a B.S. in Materials Science and Engineering from the University of Utah and is passionate about polymer characterization and advancing sustainable materials through nanoscale design and processing.



Gabriela Meriano

PhD Candidate, Materials Science and Engineering

Baylor University

2025 Rehkopf Scholar

Gabriela Meriano graduated from Baylor University with a bachelor's in mechanical engineering with an aerospace concentration. She is pursuing a PhD at Baylor University studying materials science and engineering and a master's in mechanical engineering. She works in the Scientific Innovations in Complex Engineering Materials Lab (Sic'Em Lab) making composite parts for nondestructive testing for aerospace applications. Her focus is on flash thermography in aerospace composites with a current interest in BVID (barely visible impact damage).

About the SPE ACCE

Held annually in suburban Detroit, the ACCE draws 500 speakers, exhibitors, sponsors and attendees and provides an environment dedicated solely to discussion, education and networking about advances in transportation composites. Its global appeal is evident in the diversity of exhibitors, speakers, and attendees who come to the conference from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia/Pacific and South America as well as North America. About 20% of attendees work for automotive and light truck, agriculture, truck & bus or aviation OEMs and another 25% represent tier suppliers. Attendees also work for composite materials processing equipment, additives, or reinforcement suppliers; trade associations, consultancies, university and government labs; media; and investment banks. ACCE has been jointly produced by the SPE Automotive and Composites Divisions since 2001. For more info go to: <https://speautomotive.com/acce-conference/>.

The mission of SPE is to promote scientific and engineering knowledge relating to plastics worldwide and to educate industry, academia, and the public about these advances. SPE's Automotive Division is active in educating, promoting, recognizing, and communicating technical accomplishments in all phases of plastics and plastic-based composite developments in the global transportation industry. SPE's Composites Division does the same with a focus on plastic-based composites in multiple industries. Topic areas include applications, materials, processing, equipment, tooling, design, and development. For more info go to: <https://speautomotive.com/> and <https://composites.4spe.org/>. For more information on the Society of Plastics Engineers, see www.4spe.org.