



# 2024 DEI & Professional Development Scholarship Winners



## **MARIA DEL ALMA CONCEPCION RODRIGUEZ**

**Ph.D. Student – Civil Engineering (Water Resources)  
Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico**

Throughout my educational journey and early career experiences, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of DEI initiatives. Participating in DEI initiatives has not only broadened my understanding of different perspectives but has also enriched my personal and professional growth in multiple ways. On a personal level, engaging in DEI initiatives has deepened my empathy and compassion for others, as I have learned to recognize and challenge my own biases and assumptions. These experiences have equipped me with the skills and mindset necessary to navigate diverse environments with humility and respect, fostering meaningful connections with individuals from all walks of life. I've gained valuable insights, developed empathy, and enhanced my leadership skills by embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Moving forward, I'm committed to leveraging these experiences to drive positive change in my career, fostering inclusive environments where everyone feels valued and empowered to succeed.



## **VISHWA SHAH**

**Ph.D. Student – Civil & Environmental Engineering  
Virginia Tech**

Vishwa Shah is currently pursuing her PhD in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Virginia Tech. Her academic journey began with a B.E. in Civil Engineering from The M.S. University in Vadodara, India, in 2013, followed by an M.S. in Environmental Science from the New York Institute of Technology in 2016. She further enhanced her academic credentials with an M.Eng in Environmental Engineering from the Stevens Institute of Technology in 2019. Her research endeavors focus on exploring the intricacies of water quantity and quality within urban watersheds, particularly examining the impacts of climate change and land use dynamics. Utilizing a multi-model ensemble approach, Vishwa employs a combination of simplistic, complex, and hybrid models, integrating geospatial, quantitative, and statistical methodologies to provide comprehensive water quality simulations.

Vishwa is an active member of AWRA and AWWA. Leveraging her expertise in hydrologic modeling and her involvement in these societies, she aspires to pursue a career in academia, where she intends to delve deeper into her passion for hydrologic models, particularly exploring the applications of deep learning techniques.



## **WUHUAN ZHANG**

**Post Doctoral Scholar in Civil & Environmental Engineering**

As a postdoctoral scholar, participating in AWRA DEI initiatives holds immense significance for both my life and career trajectory. Growing up in a multicultural environment and navigating through academia, I have developed a deep appreciation for diversity and equity. Participating in AWRA DEI initiatives will not only align with my personal values but also enrich my professional journey.

Engaging in DEI initiatives will expose me to diverse perspectives, experiences, and ideas. This exposure will broaden my understanding of various social issues and help me develop empathy and cultural competence, which are crucial skills for effective collaboration and leadership in any field. Working within diverse teams fosters collaboration and innovation. By participating in AWRA DEI initiatives, I will refine my ability to collaborate across different backgrounds,



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ultimately strengthening my teamwork and communication skills. In today's globalized world, organizations value individuals who can navigate diverse environments and contribute to inclusive practices. Actively participating in DEI initiatives demonstrates my commitment to creating inclusive spaces and can enhance my competitiveness for future career opportunities, whether in academia, industry, or non-profit sectors. Engaging with DEI initiatives allows for personal growth and self-reflection. It challenges me to confront my own biases and assumptions, fostering a continuous learning mindset and promoting self-awareness. By contributing to AWRA's DEI efforts, I have the opportunity to make a tangible difference within my academic community. Whether through organizing events, advocating for policy changes, or supporting underrepresented groups, I can actively contribute to creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for all.

Overall, participating in AWRA DEI initiatives is not just about advancing my career but also about embodying my values and making meaningful contributions to society. It will empower me to become a more effective researcher, collaborator, and advocate for diversity and inclusion in both my professional and personal spheres.