

# Celebrating Firsts and Excellence: 2024 NAA Awards

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Each year, the Newcomb Alumnae Association (NAA) honors Newcomb and Tulane graduates who have made exceptional achievements in their industries, contributed to their communities, and shown overwhelming dedication to their alma mater.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the NAA awards and also celebrates two exciting firsts. For the first time, awards are being presented during the homecoming celebration, and the Live Oak Award, an award honoring an alum whose teaching, advocacy, or organizing efforts have increased educational opportunities within their community, is being presented for the first time. The Live Oak award recipients work should enhance equity and equality, have been recognized and respected by others, and inspire future generations from all backgrounds and abilities.

In 2024, the NAA Awards Committee has selected the following alumnae to be recognized at this year's homecoming celebration:



**Newcomb Alumnae Association Outstanding Alumna  
Flora Fenner McConnell Hammond, MD, (NC '86, M\*90)**

Dr. Flora Hammond has provided extensive advocacy, service, and leadership in improving the lives of people affected by disability with tireless passion, compassion, creativity, and collegiality. Dr. Hammond's service is firmly grounded in the example set by her parents, C. Fenner McConnell, MD (Tulane '55, M '59) and Shirley McConnell, who taught her that in work, life, and play, we should care for others and always do our best. Her commitment to the community started to take root during

her time at Newcomb College and Tulane University School of Medicine.

Dr. Hammond's years of research and leadership have profoundly impacted rehabilitation science and practice. Her research has expanded our knowledge about how people change over the years after brain injury, dispelling the myth that one's function remains the same over time after brain injury. Dr. Hammond is leading an initiative to change the view of brain injury as an incident with limited short-term treatment to a chronic condition that must be proactively managed throughout one's life. She and her colleagues have developed a new model of care for chronic brain injury, including improving the accuracy and quality of patient-family discussions after head trauma. She has also led presentations highlighting the irreversible consequences of inaccurate outcome predictions.

Dr. Hammond is currently Professor and Chair of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) at Indiana University School of Medicine and Chief of Medical Affairs at the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana.



**Newcomb Alumnae Association Community Service Award  
Hon. Robin M. Giarrusso (NC '74, L \*77)**

Robin M. Giarrusso served as a judge of the Civil District Court for the Parish of Orleans from 1988 to 2023, and she served as the Court's Chief Judge from 1998 to 2000. Judge Giarrusso was appointed by the Louisiana Supreme Court to the State's Judiciary Commission and served as Chair of the Commission during the last year of her appointment.

Judge Giarrusso is incredibly active in the community. She is a vice president of the National Council of Jewish Women, a board member of the Jewish Endowment Foundation, a member of the Downtown Rotary Club, a past president of Congregation Temple Sinai, the previous membership vice-president of the New Orleans Bar Association Inn of Court, a board member of the Tulane Alumni Association, and a former assistant bar examiner. She has also served on the board of the Anti-Defamation League, Jewish Children's Regional Service, the Pro-Bono Project, as Vice President of the Newcomb College Alumnae Association Board, and as the class agent for the Newcomb College Class of 1974. She was a frequent lecturer at continuing legal education seminars on topics such as ethics, professionalism, civil procedure, and women in the judiciary. Judge Giarrusso received the First Annual Michaelle Pitard Wynne Professionalism Award from the Association for Women Attorneys and the National Urban League Award for Distinguished Public Service. Judge Giarrusso received the Pro Bono Project Distinguished Jurist Award in 2015 and the Arceneaux Professionalism Award from the New Orleans Bar Association in 2023.

Judge Giarrusso has lectured on and is interested in advocacy for people with physical disabilities. She is a former board member of Resources for Independent Living, Easter Seals, and the Education and Support Program for Children's Hospital. In 2023, Giarrusso received the South-Central region of the Anti-Defamation League's A.I. Botnick Torch of Liberty Award alongside President Mike Fitts. She is a Board member at Touro Infirmary.

Judge Giarrusso is a graduate of Newcomb College and Tulane University Law School. Before her election, she served on the City Attorney's Office staff, where she specialized in contract and public bid matters. She is the proud mother of her son and the proud grandmother of her two granddaughters.



**Newcomb Alumnae Association Young Alumna Award  
Rachael Richard (LA '19)**

Rachael Richard got her bachelor's from Tulane before returning to her home state of New Jersey to teach high school history. She later went to Columbia University Teachers College for her master's because of her commitment to representing the histories and cultures of underrepresented communities in the social studies classroom. Through project-based learning and engagement with graphic novels as alternative texts, Rachael's non-traditional approach to the classroom encourages

the empowerment of student choice and civic engagement.

Rachael's most recent endeavor has involved developing an Indigenous History of North America elective at Bayonne High School. The elective was developed through representative scholarship and a partnership with the Lakota Nation on the Pine Ridge Reservation. In the fall of 2023, her scholars held discussions with reservation representatives over Zoom to determine the community's needs. Then, they held a toiletries drive collecting and shipping out more than 300+ high-need toiletries items for the reservation. In the spring of 2024, Rachael helped her students organize a Krispy Kreme Fundraiser to support updating the heating units on the reservation, raising over \$800. In 2024, Rachael was awarded the Cohen-Jordan Award for Outstanding Social Studies Teaching by the Middle States Council for Social Studies and is an active presenter on topics like graphic novels and challenging the deficit mindset in Indigenous history for the New Jersey Council for Social Studies annual conference.

Outside of the classroom, Rachael works as a field instructor for the urban wilderness company Team Wilderness, which empowers Hudson County youth through outdoor experiences. Rachael has helped bring her love of hiking and nature into the classroom, taking her scholars on hikes to learn about George Washington's winter encampments, Lenni-Lenape migration, and land stewardship. For the 2024-2025 school year, Rachael is also a Teach Asian American Stories Fellow, and she will continue to develop curriculum and professional workshops to aid New Jersey teachers.



**Newcomb Alumnae Association Live Oak Award  
Mildred (Millibeth) Currie (NC '89)**

Millibeth Currie is a passionate and dedicated educator who has made significant contributions to the field of STEM education through extensive collaboration with various stakeholders. Recognizing the importance of making learning relevant and engaging for students, she has developed and fostered numerous partnerships with industry professionals, academic institutions, and community organizations to enhance STEM teaching and learning.



One of Millibeth's notable collaborations involved bringing a speaker to her classroom to discuss fragile X syndrome, a genetic disorder, which helped her students understand the real-world implications of genetics. Her work with the MIT Women's Initiative Program brought female engineering students to Charleston County School District (CCSD) schools to conduct hands-on STEM challenges, inspiring young students to pursue STEM careers. Millibeth has also partnered with the CCSD Career and Technology Education (CTE) program and Work-based Learning Partnerships Coordinator Chad Vail to expand STEM opportunities. Through these collaborations, she has created programs like Women in Charge (WIC), which has formed outreach initiatives with local and national STEM leaders, including NASA engineer Tia Ferguson (E '89) and landscape architects, providing students with practical, real-world STEM experiences. A great example is how Women in Charge students learn from surgeons, Dr. Kate White and Dr. Galin Jackson Spicer (N '91), to suture wounds (on bananas) while working with surgeons. She finds ways to remove the fear and mystery from STEM fields so students are more likely to pursue them.

Her partnerships extend to higher education as well, with partnerships with professors from Florida State University and the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) to conduct research and present STEM modules to her students. Millibeth's students have also benefited from collaborations with companies and labs like the Charleston Digital Corridor and Michelin. Her dedication to STEM education is further exemplified by her work with the National Labs in New Mexico, which led to the integration of cybersecurity into her STEM curriculum, and her coordination of the Greenwood Genetics Lab mobile visits to her school. She has provided her students invaluable opportunities to engage with STEM professionals and explore potential career paths through these initiatives.

Millibeth's efforts earned her the Digital Innovation and Learning Award Community Counts from Ed Surge and Digital Promise. This award celebrates her dedication to involving the entire community, including students, parents, and local stakeholders in the educational process. Most recently, she was named the 2024 South Carolina STEM Educator of the Year.

**Thanks everyone who took the time to submit a nomination. Please note that nominations are valid for three years from the date of submission. We eagerly anticipate celebrating the outstanding achievements of these remarkable alumnae in November, and we look forward to reading more inspiring award nominations in the coming year.**