EPP25 Biennial Education and Science Forum

Program Recap and Participant Survey Summary

July 20 to 23, 2026

The City College of New York, CUNY

Presented by NOAA CESSRST, CCME II, LMRCSC, and NCAS M

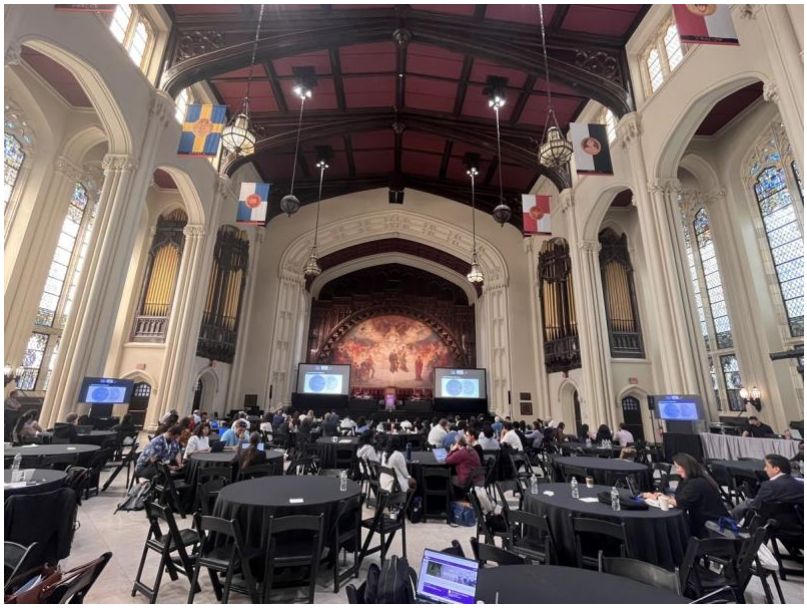
Twenty-fifth anniversary of the NOAA Educational Partnership Program

Completed by MN Associates, Inc.

Table of Contents

Overview

The forum brought together NOAA's Cooperative Science Centers for four days of technical sessions, poster presentations, career development workshops, panels, and a business meeting for each center. The week opened with concurrent technical sessions and workshops, continued with two full poster sessions and a series of career-readiness consultations, and closed on Thursday with center business meetings and an awards and jubilee ceremony. Weather was clear throughout, and the venue, the Great Hall and Shepard Hall at the City College of New York, provided a fitting backdrop for a milestone year. NCAS M was well represented, with roughly twenty-five students, faculty mentors, education specialists, postdoctoral researchers, and research scientists in attendance.



Attendees gathered in the Great Hall during a plenary session.

The NCAS M information table at the forum.

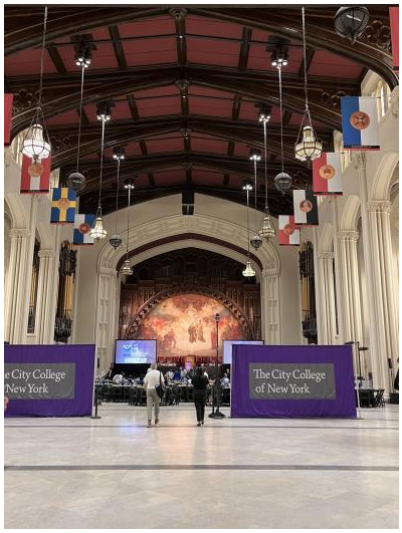
The Great Hall and CCNY's Neo-Gothic Campus

The forum's host venue is itself part of the story. Shepard Hall, which contains the Great Hall where the plenary sessions and banquet were held, is the largest of five landmark buildings that the City College of New York completed in 1907 on its Hamilton Heights campus in upper Manhattan. All five buildings, Shepard Hall, Baskerville Hall, Compton and Goethals Halls, Wingate Hall, and Townsend Harris Hall, were designed as one unified project by the architect George B. Post, who was also responsible for the New York Stock Exchange building. Post reportedly prepared two competing designs for the trustees, one neoclassical and one in the English Gothic style. He is said to have favored the neoclassical version. Still, the trustees chose Gothic, and the result is considered one of the finest examples of collegiate Neo-Gothic architecture in the United States.

The buildings are faced in dark Manhattan schist, quarried from the same bedrock the campus sits on, and trimmed with pale terra cotta tracery, arches, and a set of decorative grotesques that reference the academic disciplines once housed inside. When the campus opened in 1907, Mark Twain served as the principal speaker at the dedication ceremony. Shepard Hall was named for Edward Morse Shepard, an alumnus and long-serving board chairman who helped secure the land and funding for the new campus.

The Great Hall itself, tucked on the second floor of Shepard Hall, seats about fifteen hundred people and was built in the tradition of a grand European university hall. Its scale and detail make it one of the largest and most striking assembly rooms in New York City, and a fitting place to mark twenty-five years of the Educational Partnership Program. The building's terra cotta facades proved structurally fragile over the following decades, since much of the ornament was load-bearing rather than a veneer over steel or concrete, and the campus underwent a decades-long restoration that replaced tens of thousands of terra cotta pieces while preserving Post's original design. The work has since been recognized with historic preservation awards, and the campus is listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places.

One of the Neo-Gothic archways connecting the campus buildings.

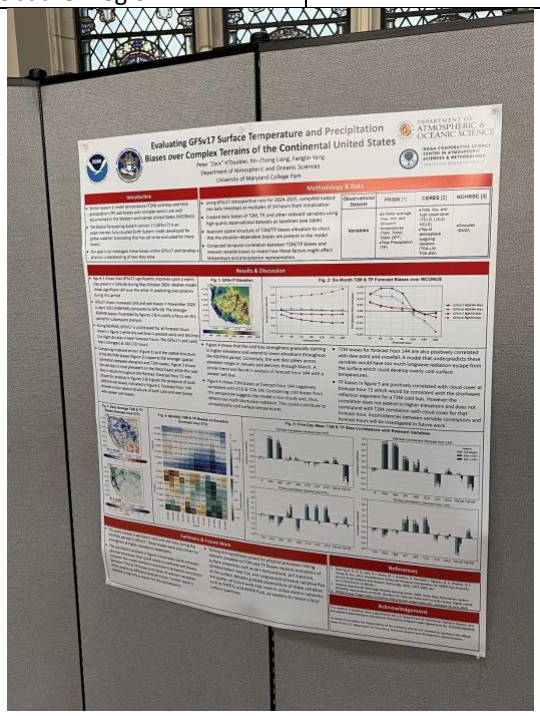


Inside the Great Hall, beneath its Gothic arch and organ pipes.

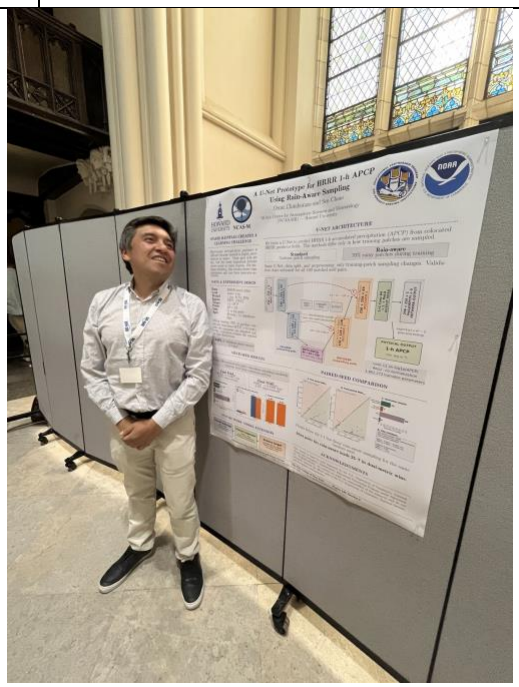
Poster Session Highlights

Poster sessions spanned a wide range of NOAA mission science, from numerical weather prediction and machine learning to ocean forecasting and air quality. A sample of the research presented is summarized below.

Topic	Institution or Program	Key Point
GFSv17 surface temperature and precipitation biases over complex terrain	University of Maryland, Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Science	GFSv17 improves on an earlier warm season bias but develops a stronger cold and wet bias in winter months, with the cold bias intensifying at higher elevations.
A U-Net prototype for HRRR one-hour precipitation using rain-aware sampling	Howard University, NCAS M	Sampling training patches with a higher proportion of rain gave a modest but consistent improvement in validation accuracy over standard uniform sampling.
Prediction skill and predictability of physical and biogeochemical ocean variables in the Greater Antilles	University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez, NOAA Educational Partnership Program	Sea surface temperature and salinity forecasts retained skill beyond simple persistence. Nutrient variable predictability depended more on the initialization month.
Effect of planetary boundary layer height and other meteorological variables on fine particulate matter in the El Paso Juarez region	University of Texas at El Paso, NCAS M II Fellowship	The typical inverse relationship between boundary layer height and particulate matter holds under calm conditions but breaks down during strong wind events and downdrafts.

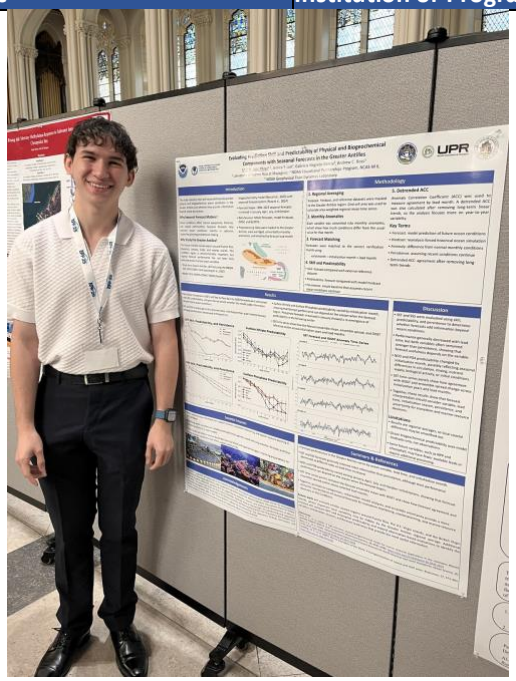


Poster on GFSv17 surface temperature and precipitation biases.

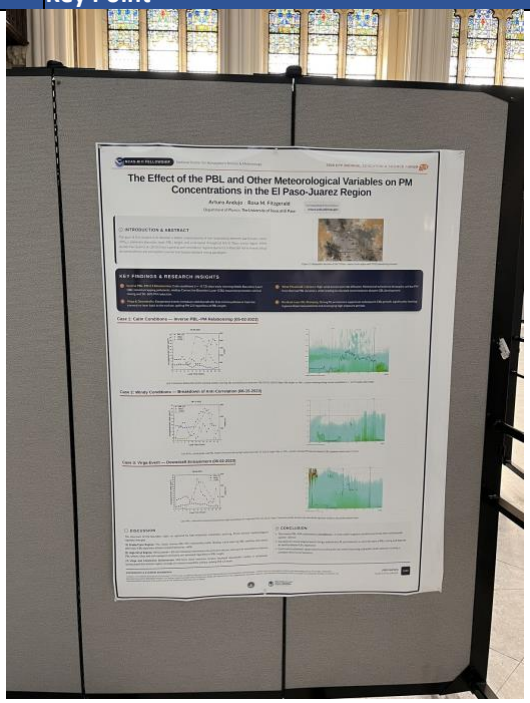


A researcher presents his U-Net-based approach to short-range precipitation prediction.

Topic	Institution or Program	Key Point



A student presents research on seasonal ocean forecasts in the Greater Antilles.



Poster on boundary layer effects on particulate matter in the El Paso Juarez region.

Programming and Panels

- An interactive panel, titled Origin Stories and Navigating the Space, featured NOAA Educational Partnership Program alumni now leading private sector ventures in environmental technology, satellite data, and geospatial services. Panelists discussed their career paths from the program into entrepreneurship.
- A related working session, Origin Story to Elevator Pitch, gave attendees a hands-on chance to turn their own background into a short and compelling pitch.
- Career readiness consultations ran alongside lunch and the poster sessions, giving fellows one-on-one time with NOAA and industry professionals.
- The forum closed with an awards ceremony and a jubilee closing ceremony on Thursday, marking the program's twenty-fifth year.

The Origin Stories and Navigating the Space panel.

A general session bringing together an alumni meet and greet and career panel discussion.

Panelists field questions during another general session discussion.

Business Meeting Summary

The business meeting was held Thursday morning from 8:45 to 10:15. The main themes are summarized below.

Theme	Detail
Placement rate	Only about three percent of fellows across all Cooperative Science Centers, not NCAS M alone, are ultimately hired by NOAA. Program leadership named this as a priority, including educating NOAA decision makers who need to open the door for fellows.
Direct hire authority	Fellows can be hired directly into NOAA positions without going through the standard federal application process, once a hiring manager internally sponsors the placement.
Leadership attendance	Organizers want NOAA line office directors, including those from the National Weather Service, satellite and information services, fisheries, and the ocean service,

Theme	Detail
	physically present at future forums, not only senior executives, so momentum does not stall once leadership returns to their offices.
Cross program collaboration	A recurring request from both leadership and students was that partner universities share courses and resources, and that students at different institutions be connected with each other and not only with faculty. One example raised was a partner institution opening a course to fellows from another university that lacks it.
A peer network across centers	Students raised the idea of an emerging researchers network that would let fellows at different Cooperative Science Centers stay in touch between forums, not only during the biennial meeting.
Publication support	Concern was raised that strong NCAS M research often does not make it into published articles. A student-led subgroup is being organized to help fellows turn thesis and dissertation work into research papers.
Conference strategy	The American Meteorological Society annual meeting, to be held in Denver in January, is generally favored over the American Geophysical Union meeting for cost and networking reasons. The American Meteorological Society meeting draws a few thousand attendees compared with more than thirty thousand at the Geophysical Union meeting, and travel funding per student is limited to about two thousand dollars, so a smaller and more personal conference stretches further. Students also looked forward to the traditional gathering for historically Black colleges and universities and friends held during that meeting.
Timeline management	Fellows were encouraged to move efficiently toward degree completion, both for their own career timing and because unresolved fellows carry into the next funding cycle. This is the final cohort of the current five-year NCAS M funding cycle.
Training credential	Completing the NOAA Experiential Research and Training Opportunity remains a key credential that helps fellows bypass some hurdles in the federal hiring process.
Career mobility	The National Weather Service has more operational than research positions overall, but fellows can move between operational and research tracks over time. One NCAS M alumna's path from research into weather service operations was cited as an example.

Notable Quotes and Key Takeaways

- Walk through the door, and open it for someone else behind you.
- Do not look back, but continue to move forward.

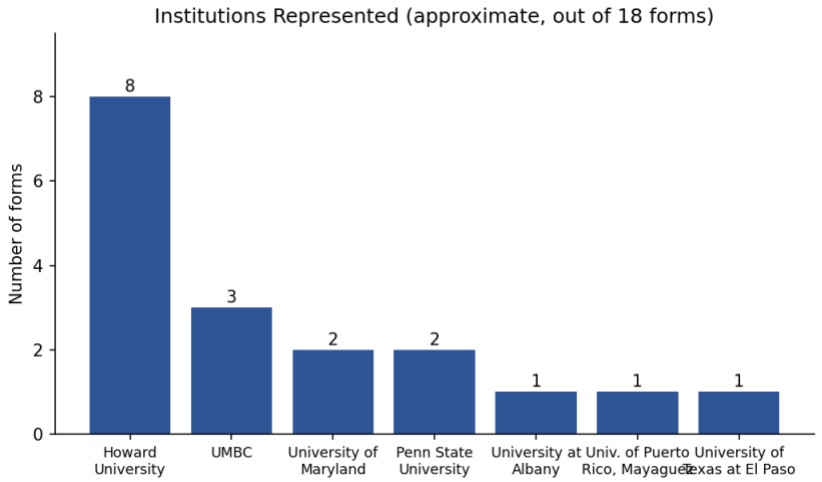
Action Items and Upcoming Dates

Item	Timing
Student Development Plan	Due mid August
Training program progress reports	Ongoing, submitted regularly
Annual Cooperative Experience	Fall, details to follow
Monthly seminar series sign-up.	Sign-up list expected early August.
American Meteorological Society abstract submission	Deadline approaching. Confirm the exact date on the Society's site.
Skills and competencies training	Ongoing as part of required center-wide programming

Participant Survey Summary

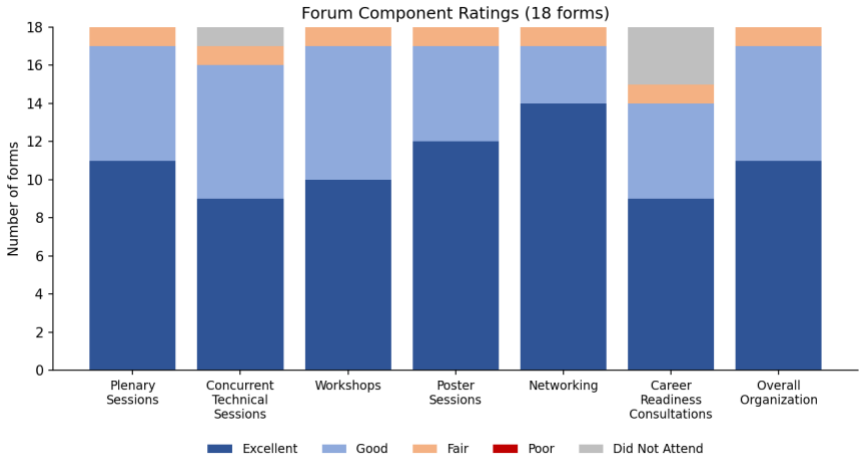
Eighteen completed NCAS M II Participant Survey forms from July 2026 were collected on paper. Out of a total 24 participants. Each form pairs a rating grid, covering plenary sessions, concurrent technical sessions, workshops, poster sessions, networking, career readiness consultations, and overall organization, with four open-ended questions: most valuable aspect, suggested improvements, how the forum supported academic or career goals, and overall satisfaction.

Institutions represented in the batch include Howard University, which accounted for the largest share of respondents, the University of Maryland Baltimore County, the University of Maryland, Penn State University, the University at Albany, the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez, and the University of Texas at El Paso.



Forum Component Ratings

Reading each checkbox row by row across all eighteen forms gives the following breakdown by rating category. Networking drew the strongest ratings, with Excellent marked on fourteen of eighteen forms. Career readiness consultations show the most Did Not Attend marks, consistent with the session being optional and running opposite other programming.

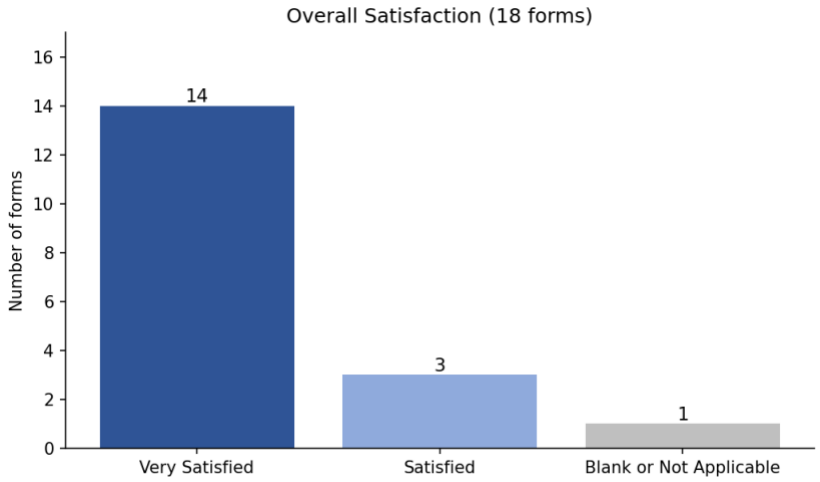


Component	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Did Not Attend
Plenary Sessions	11	6	1	0	0

Component	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Did Not Attend
Concurrent Technical Sessions	9	7	1	0	1
Workshops	10	7	1	0	0
Poster Sessions	12	5	1	0	0
Networking	14	3	1	0	0
Career Readiness Consultations	9	5	1	0	3
Overall Organization and Logistics	11	6	1	0	0

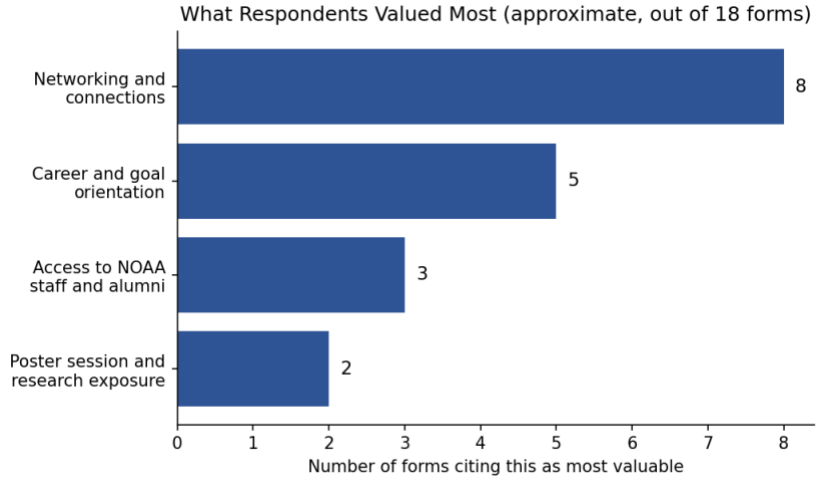
Overall Satisfaction

Fourteen of the eighteen respondents selected Very Satisfied. Three selected Satisfied, and one left the question blank.



What Respondents Valued Most

Networking and direct access to NOAA staff and program alumni were the two most frequently cited sources of value, followed by career and goal orientation and exposure to other students' research through the poster sessions.



Theme	Representative Comments
Networking and connections	Networking. Connections and collaborations. Meeting the people behind NCAS M II and networking. Connecting with others and building my network.
Career and goal orientation	Orientation on careers and goals. Participation described as having opened up options, both academic and career-related, after graduation.
Access to NOAA staff and alumni	Several respondents noted the value of interacting directly with NOAA employees and program alumni. One alumna respondent wrote that NCAS M supported her throughout her academic years and that she looked forward to returning as an alumna in 2028.
Poster session and research exposure	Comments referenced exposure to other students' research and to a wider range of career paths within the field.

Suggestions for Improvement

Suggestion	Notes
More informal networking time	Multiple respondents asked for a dedicated student-only mixer or less tightly scheduled networking time, including sessions organized by research or career interest rather than open mixing.
Workshop pacing and structure	Requests to space workshops out more, add more interactive sessions, and include more student talks.
Logistics	One respondent asked for shuttle service between the hotel and the venue.
Little to improve	Several respondents left this question blank or wrote nothing, suggesting general satisfaction with the format as run.