

Hello &
welcome to
the NE
FIRST
Mentor
Conference!

I'm
Melissa.



I'm a PhD
researcher
for Google.







FIRST Global 2023,
Singapore





FIRST[®] INSPIRE GALA 2018

Please join Dean Kamen and FIRST[®] on
Thursday, November 1, 2018

Cipriani | 55 Wall Street, NYC

6:00pm | Reception with Robots

7:00pm | Dinner and Program

HONORING

Jeff Bezos

Amazon, Blue Origin, Washington Post

Melissa Smith

Senior Experience Researcher, Google and FIRST Alumna

CLICK TO RSVP AND RESERVE YOUR TABLE

INSPIRE YOUNG MINDS TO REACH FOR THE STARS

Find out what's possible when we dream big and work together to inspire the next generation of innovators, technology leaders, and changemakers here on Earth — and beyond.



firstinspires.org/gala



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Honored to have become a Board Member, the first FIRST alum on the Board of Directors, in 2021.



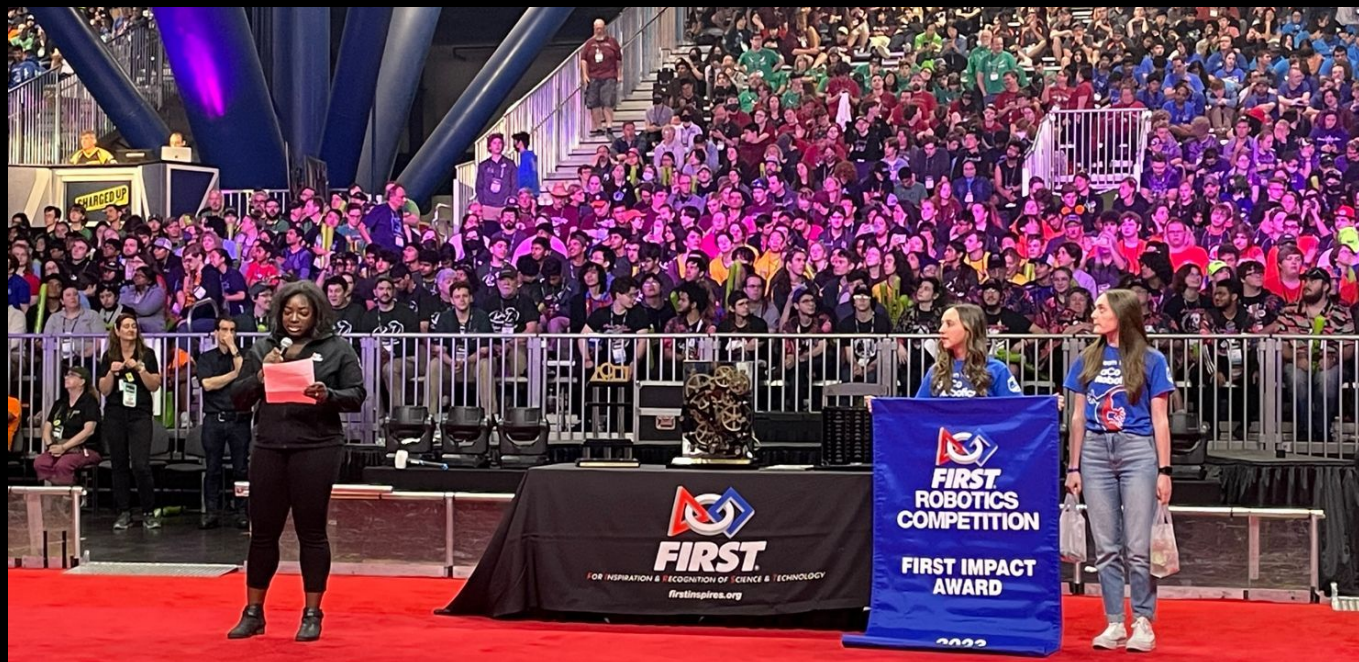
Dr. Melissa Smith UX Research Lead, Google

Melissa Smith, PhD, is a tenured User Experience Researcher and manager at Google Workspace for the Playspace Labs team, where she leads research for a multidisciplinary team innovating and building the next generation of workplace tools. Previously, she held roles working on YouTube Music & Premium, improving YouTube creator monetization, and advancing the video watching experience for the YouTube mobile app and desktop site.

Melissa is the first *FIRST*® alum on the Board, having participated as a student (*FIRST*® LEGO® League and *FIRST*® Robotics Competition) and actively volunteered in various roles for the past 24+ years. Currently, Melissa is a Regional and Championship-level Head Referee and part of the Greater San Francisco Region planning committees. She was the 2018 *FIRST* Inspire Gala Evelyn Kamen "Rising Star" Award Recipient and the 2020 San Francisco Regional Volunteer of the Year Award recipient.

Melissa holds a B.S. in Psychology from the University of Central Florida and a PhD in Human Factors & Applied Cognitive Psychology from George Mason University.

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2022

But my
favorite
pastime?

Intensely memorizing
and then purging
robotics game rules
annually.



2012



2017



2018



2019



2017



2022



2023





2007



2007

High school senior Melissa!



I wouldn't be who or
where I am without
FIRST Robotics.

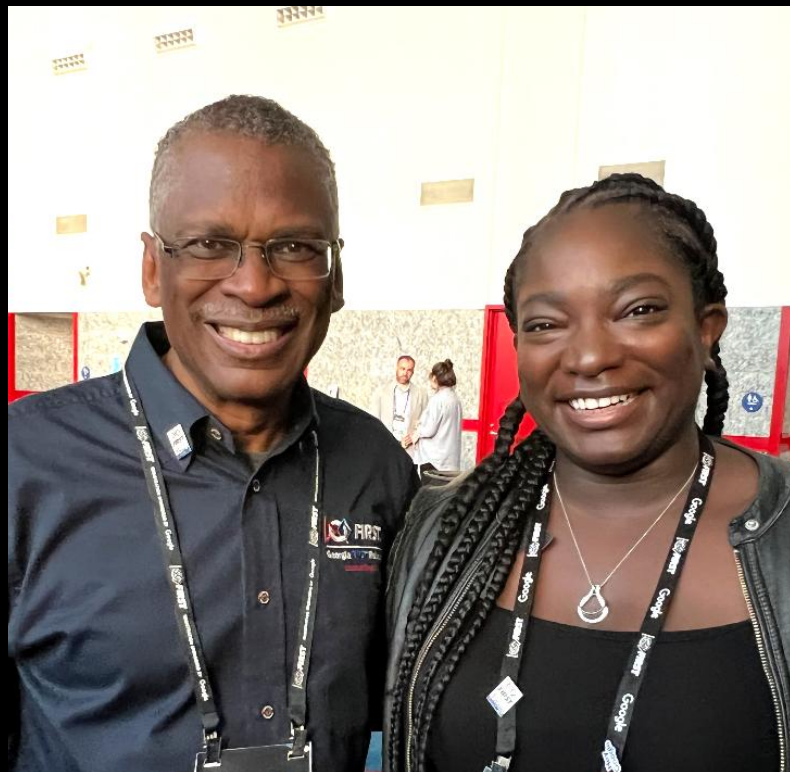
Correction:

I wouldn't be who or
where I am without
FIRST Robotics
mentors, old and new,
who have shaped me
in so many ways.

Surprisingly reunited with
my high school robotics
coach as a FIRST Board
member at 2023 Champs
(literal tears)







Thank you,
mentors.

Mediator	Researcher	Delivery driver
Debater	Instructor	Construction
Chauffeur	Advocate	Builder
Therapist	Referee	Maker
Teacher	Motivator	Artist
Chef	Nurse	Programmer
Fundraiser	Comedian	Learner
Counselor	Coach	Organizer
Engineer	Interventionist	Judge

We see you and we
wouldn't be here,
literally, without you.

I helped organized the
FIRST Mentor
Conference in 2023 as
a resource and
opportunity for
mentors.



2023



2023



2023





2024



2024



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2018

This event is for you.
Make it yours.

And remember: just
being there is already
enough for your
students.

"FIRST taught me how to work cooperatively with people, how to ask for help when I was stuck, how to help others without ego or expectation, how to work as a team member towards a goal that benefits everyone, how to break down complex problems into manageable chunks, and how to explain complicated topics and concepts in easy-to-understand ways. All of these skills I continue to actively use on a daily basis and I credit learning them through FIRST, from my mentors, at a young age with my continued success in my career endeavors."

--Melissa Smith, PhD



Enjoy the
conference!



I am very excited to still help out when I can, both because I truly believe in the impacts of this organization and also because I think it is important for students coming behind me to see a black woman in tech who benefited from FIRST and be able to chat with me - and for me to continue to be inspired by them.

STELLAR ALUMNI

NAME

Melissa Smith

CAREER

User Experience Researcher at Google

EDUCATION

George Mason University (PhD, Human Factors & Applied Cognitive Psychology);
University of Central Florida (B.S. Psychology)

TEAM

Team1251, TechTigers



YEAR(S) ATTENDED THE ORLANDO/FLORIDA REGIONAL

2003 (8th grade FLL student), 2004-2005 (with the 408 RoboTicks) 2006-2007 (with the 1251 TechTigers)

HOW HAS WHAT YOU LEARNED IN FIRST HELP YOU SUCCEED IN YOUR CAREER?

FIRST taught me how to work cooperatively with people, how to work as a team member towards a goal that benefits everyone, how to break down complex problems into manageable chunks, and how to explain complicated topics and concepts in easy-to-understand ways. All of these skills I continue to actively use on a daily basis and I credit learning them through FIRST at a young age with my continued success in my career endeavors.

WHAT ARE OR HAVE YOU WORKED ON IN YOUR CAREER THAT YOU ARE MOST PROUD OF?

Objectively, I am proud and humbled to have completed my PhD at age 26 (the youngest in my program's recent history!) and to have been featured in the UCF 30 under 30 Alumni! More personally, I am proud that I was able to convert my love for robotics into a tangible research path and career, even if not in the traditional "engineering" sense. Though my work at Google is not in robotics at the moment, the foundations of human-computer interaction and human trust in automation that I first stumbled into via FIRST still inform my ongoing research and love for answering questions.

This description I gave when I was chosen as a stellar alum for the 2018 Orlando Regional concisely sums up what I gained from FIRST and why I continue to help out!

"FIRST taught me how to work cooperatively with people, how to work as a team member towards a goal that benefits everyone, how to break down complex problems into manageable chunks, and how to explain complicated topics and concepts in easy-to-understand ways. All of these skills I continue to actively use on a daily basis and I credit learning them through FIRST at a young age with my continued success in my career endeavors."



Interviewing Will.I.Am & Dean Kamen at 2023 FIRST Inspire Gala

