



SXSW EDU® Announces Zaila Avant-garde, Emily Oster, and More as Featured Speakers & 60+ Sessions

November 3, 2021, Austin, Texas – Today, SXSW EDU® announces a new lineup of featured voices for the 2022 Conference & Festival covering topics including innovative approaches to learning, the future of world building, and data informed parenting. Scripps National Spelling Bee Champion and three-time Guinness World Records title holder **Zaila Avant-garde** has joined the SXSW EDU Featured Speaker lineup in conversation with Executive Director of Scripps National Spelling Bee, **Dr. J. Michael Durnil**. The conference also welcomes Author & Professor of Economics at Brown University, **Emily Oster, PhD**, as well as a special discussion with Co-Founder and President of E-Line Media, **Alan Gershenfeld** and **Alex McDowell**, Co-Founder and Creative Director of Experimental Design.

In addition to the [180+ sessions](#) that were previously announced, SXSW EDU is announcing an additional **60+ PanelPicker sessions** that have been added to the **SXSW EDU Schedule**. Attendees have the opportunity to participate in a variety of programming across tracks exploring matters shaping education and society today such as Accessibility & Inclusion, Arts & Storytelling, Community Initiatives, Emerging Tech, Equity & Justice, Policy & Civic Engagement, and Practice & Pedagogy, to name a few.

“We are excited to be joined by such a creative and innovative lineup of guests. With each year comes new defining layers and concepts that evolve how we approach the educational process. These are the leaders not only helping us to understand and break down the meaning behind those concepts, but shaping the future of their impact,” said Greg Rosenbaum, Head of SXSW EDU.

Newly announced speakers diving into these subjects include:

Zaila Avant-garde – Zaila Avant-garde is the **2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee Champion** and the first African American to win the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 93 editions of the competition. Capturing the 2021 spelling title is only her latest entry in the history books. Avant-garde holds three basketball-related records in the *Guinness Book*

of World Records: the most bounce juggles in one minute with four basketballs, the most basketball bounces in 30 seconds with four basketballs, and ties of the record for most basketballs dribbled at once.

Dr. J. Michael Durnil – Dr. Durnil, **Executive Director of the Scripps National Spelling Bee**, leads all aspects of the Bee’s year-round educational program and builds additional opportunities for the iconic and mission-focused brand to connect with and inspire audiences across the country. Durnil has more than 35 years of professional experience in leading teams and charting operations across nonprofit, educational and media-based organizations, with a track record of bettering communities through diversity and philanthropic initiatives.

Emily Oster – Emily Oster, PhD is a **Professor of Economics at Brown University and author of *Expecting Better*, *Cribsheet* and *The Family Firm***. She holds a PhD in Economics from Harvard. Prior to being at Brown she was on faculty at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

Alan Gershenfeld – Alan Gershenfeld is **Co-Founder and President of E-Line Media**, a developer of games that help players understand and shape the world. E-Line titles include the BAFTA award winning *Never Alone*, *Gamestar Mechanic*, *Beyond Blue*, *The Endless Mission* and *MinecraftEdu*. Alan has worked on impact game projects with the Gates Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, NSF, BBC, USAID, DARPA, White House OSTP, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Games for Change, Google, Sesame Workshop, MIT Center for Bits and Atoms, ASU Center for Games and Impact and numerous other impact and academic organizations.

Alex McDowell – Alex McDowell has worked with directors Steven Spielberg, David Fincher, Anthony Minghella, Tim Burton, Terry Gilliam, Zack Snyder and many others. Alex is currently a professor at USC School of Cinema, where he directs the World Building Media Lab and World Building Institute, and teaches world building as a media-and platform-agnostic post-cinematic narrative design practice. Alex also is **Co-Founder and Creative Director of Experimental Design**, a design and production studio that uses world building and storytelling to prototype the future and provoke change.

For more information on our speaker lineup, please visit sxswedu.com/program.

Press Credentials:

To register, please go to sxswedu.com/press.

About SXSW EDU:

The SXSW EDU® Conference & Festival is a reflection of the world's most critical social issues as seen through the lens of education. This year's event will bring together the learner, the practitioner, the entrepreneur, and the visionary to share their groundbreaking stories, tackle complex issues, and build reimagined paths forward. As a community of diverse people who are united around a like minded vision for the future, SXSW EDU serves a place for attendees to renew their purpose in practice from both a personal and professional perspective. It is a place to reinforce the core principles of teaching and learning as well as an opportunity to express your creativity and passion for education. SXSW EDU is a component of the South by Southwest® family of conferences and festivals that has grown from 800 to over 8,000 registrants in the last decade. Join the passionate and innovative community at SXSW EDU, March 7-10, 2022.

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