

Kristine Atiyeh – This Is How I Work

This month we are looking at Kristine Atiyeh, an inspiring mentor who helps kids learn in all sorts of ways. She is a teacher and mentor to many young kids, from her art classes to her work with Lego Robotics for the Latino STEM Alliance. She shares her knowledge of robotics gained from years of experience of being on FRC team 175 Buzz Robotics. She is now a mentor on 125 NUTRONS and was recently on GameSense to present the 2016 game hint! If you want to know more about this incredible mentor and her experiences, read the article and see how our amazing FRC mentors work!

[Responses from July 28, 2015]

Name: Kristine Atiyeh

CD Username: [Katiyeh07](#)

Current Gig/Job: Elementary Art Educator- Norwood Public Schools / Robotics Educator – Latino STEM Alliance

Alma Mater/Degree: BFA Art Education from Massachusetts College of Art and Design

Current Team(s): [125 NUTRONS](#)

Former Team(s): [175 Buzz Robotics](#) - Student / 126 Gael Force - Mentor

Location: Boston, MA

Hobbies: Taking care of my class pet, Tacos the Leopard Gecko and the occasional art making.



What inspired you to do what you do? Tell us a story.

When I was in high school I went to my freshman open house and saw the ceramics teacher throwing on the potter's wheel. It was one of the most mesmerizing things I had seen, so I signed up for all of his ceramics classes. I didn't think about going into teaching until one of my mentors on 175 sat me down to help me figure out what I wanted to do beyond high school. Mike Sperber made me see the importance and value of working directly with people on a regular basis. He also made me see the parallels in art education and STEM world. I was/am horrible with math, so I knew engineering wasn't exactly up my ally.

Teaching art allows me to integrate other subject areas and teach it in a different way that makes more sense to some students. We do a lot of science and math based projects in my curriculum, and my students sometimes don't quite realize they're doing something with really strong math concepts until I point it out. Which sometimes makes them mad, but they're usually pretty excited and interested when they can apply math, science and writing concepts in their artwork. I've also realized that comparing any sort of learning concept to food makes any kid understand what's going on. For example

when we do clay I typically tell them to roll it out to the thickness of a fluffy pancake, or fold in the shape of a Dorito.

I started teaching Lego Robotics for the Latino STEM Alliance after joining the NUTRONS in the spring of 2014. This was really rewarding for me to work with elementary students doing robotics, and we even managed to integrate some art into it during our summer program. I really love doing this because my NUTRONS students help me learn the skill sets that I teach my students. It's also a nice break from being covered in art materials and anxiously hoping no one dumps paint water all over the place (because school paper towels, yes the brown ones, are AWFUL). However we do usually get our robots to draw, it's a great way to challenge the students by having to create a mechanism that will hold a marker and program their robot to create certain shapes.

What is your day job, and how'd you get there?

I'm an elementary art teacher for Norwood Public Schools, and have approximately 760 students between in grades 1 through 5 at two different schools. I got there by applying for a million jobs, my interview in Norwood went really well and they were super interested in my robotics background. What I absolutely LOVE about my school district is how local businesses display student artwork and how unbelievably supportive my Fine Arts boss is of my robotics endeavors. We're hopefully (fingers crossed) starting a Jr FLL team this year at my schools, and at the very least a robotics after school club. I also teach Lego Robotics to a group of elementary students in Dorchester through an amazing Boston nonprofit called the Latino STEM Alliance. They bring robotics programs to students of all ages in low income areas.

One of my absolute favorite things about being a teacher is seeing a student do something or figure something out for the first time on their own. I've gotten to see a few kids tie their shoe on their own for the first time, and the look on their face is pretty much indescribably awesome.

What is your favorite story to tell about robotics?

At World Champs this past year, I had ordered a giant box of *WE ARE NE* sunglasses to hand out to teams. It was last minute, but they were slated to be delivered to my hotel (which is an entire circus of a story in itself) on Wednesday of the event, which was perfect timing. Wednesday came and went and a message on the FedEx tracking page said "No attempt made, delivery scheduled for next business day". The next day the same message popped up, so I tweeted at FedEx with a screenshot of the weird message, and then bumped into a group of FedEx employees in the pits. I asked if they would know anything about it and they took down my tracking number and information after apologizing and being really nice. Within 30 minutes of speaking with them, they found me in the pits again and told me they were working on it and had located my package. Within an hour of first speaking with them, they came by my team's pit and had 2 tote bags full of FedEx selfie sticks since we didn't have our package of sunglasses yet (there are few things more exciting to a NUTRONS team member than a selfie stick), which blew me away, they definitely didn't have to do that. Then within

about an hour and a half of first speaking to them, they delivered my box of sunglasses TO MY TEAM'S PIT. Somehow managed to locate the package, get it to the dome, and then get it to my pit. It was hands down the best customer service experience of my life so far, the FedEx employees at Championships were unbelievable.



What's your favorite robot that you didn't help build?

It's a tie between 25's robot in 2000 and 118's Chainzilla in 2005.

As a 5th grader in 2000 I was obsessed with Toy Story and claw machines, and that robot was a gigantic claw machine. Their strategy to park themselves on the bar and just pick out the black balls was a great compliment to a lot of alliances and something I was mesmerized by as a child. I still to this day want to drive it and pick out every ball in the scoring troph.

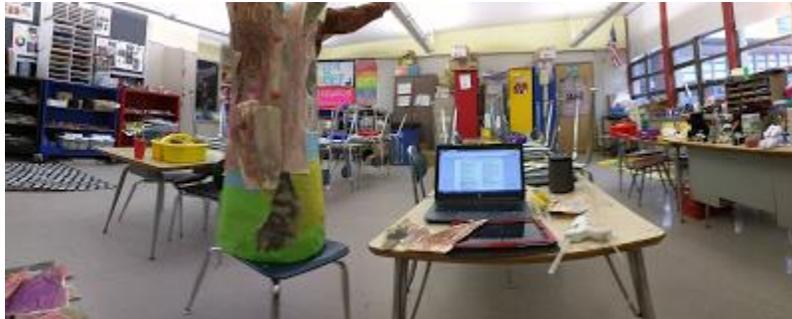
118's Chainzilla in 2005 was unlike any other robot I had ever seen before. The combo of their gigantic arms, elevator and ridiculous amount of intricately placed chain was something I was in complete awe over. My team at the time, 175, played them in the semis on Curie that year at Champs, and I didn't think we were going to beat them. Their two tetra autonomous can be seen [here](#).

What apps/software/tools can't you live without? (Work/Robotics/Home)

My Play1 is something I use a lot in my classroom and at home. Sharpies and block erasers are the two art supplies I keep stocked up the most in my classrooms, my students rip through them at an unreasonable rate. I also finally just left the stapler out next to the pencil sharpener in my room. If there's one thing I've realized about kids, it's that they will break their pencils just so they can sharpen it again and again. And they love stapling things. I'm was once told I'm a "cool teacher" because I let them use the stapler whenever and have a big basket of scotch tape rolls for whenever they're needed.

At the NUTRONS lab we can't live without our SONOS speakers and finely tuned Pandora stations, they keep things fun. Also after this season I don't think we could live without our HP mega printer. We were fortunate enough to receive a grant that allowed us to purchase a super nice printer that has a large spool of paper on it. We used it to create red carpet- like backdrops for districts and also make a 4ft by 6ft poster of the NEU District Volunteer of the Year (waddup Marc Polansky).

What's your workspace setup like? (Work/Robotics/Home)



This photo was taken late at night when I was finishing the assembly of a 5th grade collaborative sculpture. But it's one of the only photos of one of my classrooms. This is my larger school that I've now taught at for three years.

I'm incredibly lucky to have a classroom to myself at both schools. In both of my classrooms in Norwood I have a designated reading space with a lot of different books for reference and for students to check out if they finish early. At one of my schools we have Tacos the leopard gecko, after receiving a Petco Pets in the Classroom Grant last year. The students love her, I often get random drawings of her doing ridiculous things like wielding swords in space, sledding and walking through paint.

Tacos is a 7-year-old Leopard Gecko we adopted, she's currently growing her tail back, we're not sure what happened to it before we adopted her. She smiles all the time.



I have a lot of awesome photos of astronauts in this classroom along with a giant photo of a praying mantis. There's a lot of cat things in my classroom, and a giant conch shell on my desk from Cayman Brac (yes you can hear the "ocean" in it). We've also got a lot of cheesy motivational posters I've made that my students love, and next to them are the anti-Seahawks posters my students lovingly made me during the super bowl.



A new addition to my classroom/curriculum this year will be a Makerbot 3D printer that was funded through DonorsChoose.org! Pretty excited for that.

The NUTRONS lab is a really interesting space. We share a shop several other Northeastern Engineering groups such as Solar Boat, Baja Racing and Steel Bridge and the occasional cockroach. The students get an inside look at what the college groups do. We have a space we share with Steel Bridge where we do a lot of assembling, an office, a shared machine shop and a storage room. We tend to work in the hallways, unoccupied classrooms and do large group brainstorming sessions in lecture halls. We don't have an actual practice space, but we sometimes can find a room or two with a tall ceiling and some carpet to test the robot before it heads into the bag. One of my favorite things about our team is that we turn just about anything into a challenge, game, or competition with students and mentors.

This is our shared cage space where we do most of our assembly

I currently live in Jamaica Plains with Jess Boucher. It's a quiet part of Boston where you can always see someone walking their dog or running regardless of the weather and a yarn bombed tree or lamp post. It's a great community with a nice pond, great food, and lots of fun animals. There's also a ridiculously fat cat that lives across the street. Literally the fattest cat I've ever seen in my life.



What do you listen to while you work?

I have the absolute pleasure of listening to my students say the best and most ridiculous things while I work. Here are a few of my favorites:

-2nd grader: Miss Atiyeh, do you believe in ghosts?

-5th grader: I think this marker is pizza scented! (she was smelling a Sharpie)

-1st grader: Is it ok if I accidentally draw on the tables with crayon?

-2nd grade boy: I collect Pokemon cards. 2nd grade girl: I collect money

-1st grade boy: I don't care about snakes anymore, I only care about Jurassic Park.

Sometimes we listen to Jazz or music without lyrics. Despite never seeing Frozen, I know 80% of the lyrics to every song thanks to my first and second graders and Amit, our NUTRONS 2015 student captain. The teacher next door also will randomly play Take Me Out to the Ballgame really loudly around 2pm, it's weird.

What's your schedule like during build season?

Pre kick off I always tell my friends and coworkers "See you in May!". They laugh, and then they realize I'm not joking.

I go directly from work in Norwood to the NUTRONS lab at Northeastern. We meet at the lab every week day 5-9 and 10-3 ish on the weekends. Last year I managed to balance leading the Non-Technical side of our team with being the UMDD Committee Chair, NEUD Committee Event Manager, *NE FIRST* Social Media Manager and doing some other side committees for *NE FIRST*. Two nights out of the week are "Meeting Inception" nights where there's a lineup of call in meetings for district events and sub committees after my school staff meetings.

What everyday thing are you better at than anyone else?

I think I'm really good at getting my students to laugh.

I'm also pretty good at tricking leopard geckos into taking medicine.

What's the best advice you've ever received?

Be open to collaboration, surround yourself with people who will challenge and inspire you. Spend a lot of time with them, and it'll change your life.

What is your favorite guilty pleasure?

Netflix and french-fries.

Fill in the blank. I'd love to see Jamee Luce the FRC Team Advocate answer these same questions.

Anything else you want people to know about you?

It definitely feels weird sometimes being an Elementary Art teacher in the FRC community where most everyone is not quite doing that at all. I used to jokingly following up most of the things I'd say at robotics to people with: "But what do I know, I'm just an elementary school art teacher". But then I realized I know more than I give myself credit for when it comes to non-technical related things, and it took some time to

really see the value of that. People and teams who had asked me for help with grants, awards, judging, fitting my narrow wrists into awkward small places and other things that didn't involve math, made me see that the non tech knowledge I had was valuable and almost as useful as technical things. So if you're out there feeling like you're less valuable than the person who can do all the crazy geometry and programming to make the robot score the points and do the things, you're not. Especially nowadays when district rankings rely heavily on award points, and money doesn't grow on trees so grants need to be applied for. Just do you, be open to feedback, advice, read /ask up on what others are doing regardless of their team number or number of green dots they have on Delphi. Keep striving to learn more, do more, do better and help others.

"Great people do things before they're ready. They do things before they know they can do it. Doing what you're afraid of, getting out of your comfort zone, taking risks like that-that's what life is. You might be really good. You might find out something about yourself that's really special and if you're not good, who cares? You tried something. Now you know something about yourself" – Amy Poehler