

SIUE Media Campaigns Class Partners with East St. Louisans to Inspire and Engage their Community

by Megan Weiser
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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's value of citizenship is in action throughout East St. Louis as residents are motivated to engage in their community's rich history and actively contribute to its future growth.

The inspiring call to action is being led by Suman Mishra, PhD, associate professor and graduate program director in the College of Arts and Sciences' (CAS) Department of Mass Communications. She and her media campaigns students are creating an #89BlocksStrong campaign in cooperation with East Side Aligned (ESA), a "collective impact process happening within the greater East St. Louis area to improve the readiness and well-being of young people."

"We were approached by Jessica Wernli, a community organizer who works with several organizations in East St. Louis, to see if we could help her with various communication challenges that she and others were facing," Mishra explained. "She needed help launching a grassroots campaign that would inspire and motivate people to get involved within their community. This was a big and challenging task, but an exciting one as I could engage my students in the community-oriented project."

"I was looking for local partners who could help create an exciting and high-quality campaign, and Dr. Mishra was eager to get her students involved," Wernli said. "She and her students have shown a lot of passion and care for the project and the residents who are at the center of it. I'm incredibly happy with how the campaign is coming together and can't wait for the rest of the community to experience it."

The high impact community engagement practice is supported by the CAS Targeted Funding Initiative (TFI). The TFI was launched in 2015 by CAS Dean Greg Budzban, PhD, and utilizes funding acquired through the College's Winter Session courses and other CAS internal funds. To date, it has provided more than \$700,000 to faculty and staff.

The #89BlocksStrong campaign has many components, from research to media and creative implementation. Students are conducting focus groups and developing surveys to better understand residents' motivations to participate in community organizations and meetings, as well as their perceptions of East St. Louis.