



# **NSF Awards SIUE \$300K to Create Safe, Inclusive Archaeological Field Schools**

by Megan Wieser

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EDWARDSVILLE – The National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded Southern Illinois University Edwardsville \$300,000 in support of research aimed at preventing sexual harassment from occurring during undergraduate field-based courses. The endeavor is in partnership with researchers from the Arkansas Archeological Survey and Mississippi State University.

“Several studies have demonstrated high rates of sexual harassment that take place while scientists and students conduct research in the field,” explained principal investigator Carol Colaninno, PhD, research assistant professor in the SIUE STEM Center. “The issue plagues disciplines dependent on field-based research such as biology, ecology, geology and archaeology.

“Our research team plans to develop evidence-based practices and policies that field school directors can implement to prevent sexual harassment and make field schools safer and more inclusive for undergraduate students aspiring to become archaeologists.”

The researchers are all members of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference (SEAC) and include:

Emily Beahm, PhD, research station archeologist with the Arkansas Archeological Survey, University of Arkansas-Winthrop Rockefeller Institute Station

Carol Colannino, PhD, research assistant professor in the SIUE STEM Center

Carl Drexler, PhD, research assistant professor with the University of Arkansas and station archeologist with the Arkansas Archeological Survey – Southern Arkansas University research station

Shawn Lambert, PhD, assistant professor at Mississippi State University and research fellow at the Cobb Institute of Archaeology

“As a discipline, we require students to participate in a field-based course where we now know sexual harassment is more likely to occur, compared to a traditional classroom setting,” explained Beahm. “Unfortunately, our discipline has done little to understand what field directors do to prevent sexual harassment from occurring at their field school, and if field directors can improve upon their current practices. Our team is passionate to see this research conducted and to be able to provide recommendations that can improve archaeological learning.”

The researchers note that sexual harassment may be one factor contributing to the leaky pipeline among field-based sciences and STEM during undergraduate education, resulting in a loss of diverse intellectual thought.

“Research demonstrates that students who have been historically underrepresented in STEM, including women, students of color, students who identify as LGBTQ+, and students with diverse abilities, have an increased likelihood to experience harassment compared to those individuals who do not identify with these groups,” said Lambert.

“If students, particularly those who identify with groups underrepresented in STEM,” continued Drexler, “are harassed or assaulted, they may decide to leave the scientific community altogether. When this occurs, science loses the diversity of intellectual thought and personal experiences that these students who have brought to the field, and their potential to serve as role models and mentors to the next generation of diverse scholars.”

During the three-year grant period, the research team will conduct a landscape analysis, work with field directors and students, and then develop recommended practices, and finally, help implement them documenting how these practices help create a safer and more inclusive field learning environment.

Field directors interested in the project, can find more information at [siuestemcenter.org/safe-field-schools](https://siuestemcenter.org/safe-field-schools). Questions can be sent to [safefieldschools@gmail.com](mailto:safefieldschools@gmail.com).

The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Center for STEM Research, Education and Outreach comprises an independent group of researchers and educators, innovating ways to engage students and the public in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Within the SIUE Graduate School, the Center brings together research faculty, graduate students and practitioners to conduct education research. The Center contributes educational expertise to SIUE undergraduate classes and provides professional development for K-12 teachers. The Center boasts a significant library of equipment and resources, which are available for loan at no cost to campus and regional instructors. For more information, visit <https://www.siue.edu/stem/> or contact STEM Center Director Sharon Locke at (618) 650-3065 or [stemcenter@siue.edu](mailto:stemcenter@siue.edu).

Photo: Carol Colannino, PhD, research assistant professor in the SIUE STEM Center.