



SIUE Grant Program To Amplify Graduate Experience through Effective Mentorship

by Megan Wieser

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The Innovation and Excellence in Graduate Education (IEGE) grant program at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is funding new initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the graduate student mentorship.

“We are excited for the inaugural year of the IEGE program. We focused this year’s efforts on mentoring, because the guidance and support graduate students receive from their faculty mentors is crucial to their success, during the pursuit of their advanced degree and beyond,” said Jill Smucker, director of graduate education in the SIUE Graduate School and program coordinator. “Graduate students and their faculty have a unique professional relationship, and effective graduate mentorship enriches students’ academic, professional and personal growth. We look forward to seeing the immediate and enduring impact of this year’s IEGE projects on graduate student mentorship at SIUE.”

“Transforming the STEM Graduate Experience at SIUE: Evidence-based Practices to Support and Advance Effective Mentorship,” is an interdisciplinary collaboration that received \$6,375 in funding. Its research team includes:

- Carol Colaninno, PhD, research assistant professor in the SIUE STEM Center and adjunct professor in the CAS Department of Anthropology
- Adriana Martinez, PhD, associate professor in the CAS Departments of Environmental Sciences and Geography
- Rohan Benjankar, PhD, assistant professor in the School of Engineering Department of Civil Engineering
- Alan Black, PhD, assistant professor in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Department of Geography and Geographic Information Sciences
- Sharon Locke, PhD, director of the SIUE STEM Center and professor in the Department of Environmental Sciences

The research team will gather data on current perspectives and mentorship experiences, develop and implement an evidence-based STEM faculty mentorship professional development series, and use those activities to support a National Science Foundation S-STEM proposal.

Also receiving \$6,564 in funding is the initiative, “Developing an Excellent Mentor Pool,” led by Jennifer Arnoldi, PharmD, assistant director of Experiential Education and clinical associate professor in the School of Pharmacy (SOP) Department of Pharmacy Practice.

Arnoldi plans to expand the SOP's current mentorship program by incorporating interested alumni and volunteer preceptors into the pool of mentors for students. The creation of a thorough mentor training and development program aims to bolster that program.

In addition to the funded projects, the IEGE will host a professional development workshop for faculty on Thursday, March 25. Led by mentoring researcher and expert Laura Lunsford, PhD, of Campbell University, the interactive session will help faculty identify the behaviors of great mentoring, recognize and resolve dysfunctional mentoring and reflect on mentoring ethics. The workshop is open to colleagues in the SIU System.

“One other exciting piece of this project is that we are hosting an URCA (Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities) assistant this semester to lead a research project on developing effective mentorship training programs for faculty,” Smucker added. “We anticipate that this project will lay the foundation for building new support systems that enhance the faculty mentoring of graduate students now and in the future.”

Donations and pledges made to The Rosemarie Archangel, Ellen Sappington, and Stephen L. and Julia Y. Hansen Innovation and Excellence in Graduate Education Endowment, totaling \$422,153, have made this funding possible. The endowment's goal is set at \$500,000. To contribute, visit siue.edu/graduate/giving.

By preparing the next generation of leaders in a knowledge-based economy, [SIUE's Graduate School](#) fulfills the region's demand for highly trained professionals. Graduate school offerings include arts and sciences, business, education, engineering, nursing, and interdisciplinary opportunities. SIUE professors provide students with a unique integration of theoretical education and hands-on research experiences. Students can obtain graduate certificates or pursue master's degrees, and be part of a supportive learning and rich intellectual environment that is tailored to the needs of adult learners. The Graduate School raises the visibility of [research and creative activity](#) at SIUE, which ranks highest among its Illinois Board of Higher Education peers in total research and development expenditures, according to the National Science Foundation. Doctoral programs are available in nursing practice and educational leadership. Cooperative PhD programs in history, environmental resources and policy, engineering science, and computer science are offered with SIU Carbondale.

Photo: SIUE's Jill Smucker, director of graduate education in the SIUE Graduate School.