

Community-Oriented Digital Engagement Scholars Welcomed to SIUE

by Kalli Collins

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EDWARDSVILLE – Southern Illinois University Edwardsville welcomed its first cohort of Community-Oriented Digital Engagement Scholars (CODES) and their families to campus Tuesday, Aug. 16 for a special reception honoring the participants and kicking off the fall 2022 academic year.

The CODES program is an innovative, first-of-its-kind general education program comprising 25 students with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. CODES is designed for students who are first-generation, Black, Latinx, and/or Pell-eligible, are interested in research and active learning, and are committed to taking action in the community.

SIUE Chancellor James T. Minor, PhD, addressed the scholars and their families at the CODES reception with excitement for the transformational journey ahead.

“The integration of an innovative general education curriculum, built-in academic support, and meaningful undergraduate research opportunities is truly special,” Minor told the scholars. “This unique academic opportunity will prepare you to lead the communities you love and care about. Those communities are waiting on you to emerge as leaders with the intellectual tools, social sensibilities, and commitment required to solve real problems. We are proud to call you CODES Scholars and SIUE Cougars.”

The collaborative effort to create the CODES program is led by principal investigator (PI) Jessica DeSpain, PhD, professor in the Department of English Language and Literature and co-director of the SIUE Interdisciplinary Research and Informatics ([IRIS](#)) Center, and co-PI Connie Frey Spurlock, PhD, associate professor in the Department of Sociology and director of the SIUE Successful Communities Collaborative ([SSCC](#)), Jessica Harris, PhD, vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion, Maurina Auranda, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, and Howard Rambsy, PhD, professor in the Department of English Language and Literature.

“It is an honor to welcome the first cohort of CODES students and their families to SIUE,” said DeSpain. “We realized that students flourish when they work in a team and conduct research with real implications. We are bringing that model into the general education curriculum for these standout scholars.”

“It was great to have the opportunity to meet my fellow CODES classmates,” said Isabel Martinez, of Oak Lawn. “I felt reassured meeting the faculty knowing they want the best for us and for SIUE to feel like a home away from home. I am grateful for this opportunity and can’t wait for us to help change not only our community, but also the world.”

Every aspect of the program involves students working in research teams, thereby creating a tight-knit learning community. The students’ research will address topics such as mental health crises, racial justice and the human dimensions of climate change, all of which will be embedded within a community focus. The students research will focus in

Alton, working with the community partners of National Great Rivers Research and Education Center, YWCA of Southwestern Illinois and National Council of Negro Women Alton Section.

SIUE's Office of the Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion hosted the welcome reception, and the office for Student Opportunities for Academic Results (SOAR) assisted students with advising and preparing them for the fall semester.

For more information about the CODES program, visit siue.edu/vcedi/codes.

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](https://siue.edu) provides students with a high-quality education that powerfully transforms the lives of all individuals who seek something greater. A premier metropolitan university, SIUE is creating social and economic mobility for individuals while also powering the workforce of the future. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 13,000.