



# NGRREC Partners With Local Codes Program

by Jen Young

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**EAST ALTON** – This year, the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRREC) is partnering with Southern Illinois University Edwardsville’s Community Oriented Digital Engagement Scholars (CODES) to solve key issues in the region.

CODES is a new program offered through SIUE that takes an innovative approach to educating its students, focusing on real-world experiences and collaboration, hands-on learning and creating strong faculty-student connections. This year, the 25 CODES

students are focusing on Alton, and students are working to study the resiliency spatial justice in the face of a changing climate.

Three local nonprofits were chosen to work with a cohort of students. In addition to NGRREC, the other nonprofit organizations included in this year's program are the YWCA of Southwestern Illinois and the National Council of Negro Women – Alton.

“NGRREC was chosen for their emphasis on the river and their rootedness to the region and to the confluence, which are a critical part of our topic,” said CODES Director, Jessica DeSpain. “We also wanted to broaden the conception of justice to think about animals and the natural world as considerations in our work.”

NGRREC Director of Operations and Strategic Initiatives Paige Mettler-Cherry said the program is a perfect fit and aligns with the center's mission.

“NGRREC is committed to expanding the participation of first-generation and underserved student populations in STEM disciplines, particularly as part of our overall mission of educating the public on the ecology of great river systems. The CODES students have already provided NGRREC with tremendous insight on how we can improve our outreach through digital media.”

The CODES program at SIUE has been in the planning stages since 2016 and for the university, it felt there was no better time to implement it.

“It feels like now is a good time to start CODES to help students understand all facets of a problem and that the work they are doing in class matters more broadly,” DeSpain said. “COVID exposed all of the social inequities of our education and healthcare systems.”

Beyond the hands-on experiences and collaboration with outside organizations, the CODES program provides students with financial aid assistance giving students an opportunity to attend college, no matter their financial background.

“I want students to be able to take all of what they learn at the University and apply it in a concrete context to help them become agents of change and effective citizens in a digital, global world,” DeSpain said.

For more information about the CODES program visit <https://www.siue.edu/vcedi/codes/index.shtml> or contact DeSpain at [jdespai@siue.edu](mailto:jdespai@siue.edu).

“We hope to continue our partnership with the SIUE CODES program and provide additional opportunities for students who are interested in completing internships at NGRREC,” said Mettler-Cherry.

For more information about NGRREC’s internship program visit <http://www.ngrrec.org/Internship/> or contact Amy Monroe at [ammonroe@lc.edu](mailto:ammonroe@lc.edu).