



SIUE Students Seeking Alton Stories For Community Storytelling Project

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE/ALTON - Students in SIUE's Community Oriented Digital Engagement Scholars (CODES) program are looking for Alton residents to interview about their lives and work in Alton, and will compile those interviews into a digital story or short video as part of their Community Storytelling project.

Interviews will be conducted this Saturday, Feb. 18, and four 30-minute time slots are available from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Interviews will be held at the Alton YMCA, located at 304 E. 3rd St. in Alton. [Fill out this online form](#) to register and choose a time slot for an interview.

Students in the CODES program recently appeared on an episode of [Our Daily Show! on Riverbender.com](#) to discuss the project and the work they're doing.

CODES Student Spencer Steele said the main goal of the program is to listen to the voices of the community.

"For us, really it's more about the community than anything, and listening to their voice and figuring out what they want for themselves," Steele said. "I think that's a very big aspect of what we're trying to do, just trying to make the community a better place and listen to them."

SIUE Professor and program leader Dr. Jesica Despain described the "digital story" as more storyteller-guided than interviewer-guided.

"The idea behind a digital story like that is that the storyteller gets to be in the driver's seat, and they get to say, 'This is the story that's important to me,'" she said. "It's the goal of the facilitator, who in this case will be the students, to really honor that story and to help tell it as best they can."

She added that the storytellers will have “ultimate approval” over the project, “and can ask for edits to make sure that their intentions are really valued in what the final product looks like.”

Kaz Isibue, another student working on the project, said it’s very important the story reflects an accurate portrayal of Alton and its residents.

“For so long, there’s been a single story surrounding the Alton community, and we really want to break past that and really hear the truth about the people in Alton - how they feel, what they’ve experienced there,” Isibue said. “I really want to make it so it’s something the storytellers are actually proud of seeing, and that they really feel heard in it.”

Despain said her students work in small research teams on local issues, and are currently working with organizations like the YWCA of Alton, the National Council of Negro Women, and the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center.

“The idea was that lots of times when students are in those General Education courses, it doesn’t seem like the content is that connected - they don’t have a common goal, it’s just, ‘Get your English out of the way’ ... without the opportunity to think from the very minute that they arrive on campus that they can be change-makers.

“In order to do that well, students really need to listen to people’s stories, so that’s why this Community Storytelling event is so important.”

If you’re an Alton resident and/or worker who’s interested in telling your story, [fill out this online form](#) to register and choose a time slot for an interview on Saturday, Feb. 18. The full interview with DeSpain and more SIUE CODES students can be watched above or on riverbender.com/video.

The CODES program is organized by the SIUE Interdisciplinary Research and Informatics (IRIS) Center. For more information and updates as the project goes forward, visit the [SIUE IRIS Facebook page](#).