

Care and Equity in Our Water Infrastructures

CODES
Class of 2028

The 2028 cohort will partner with Heartlands Conservancy and the Jackie Joyner Kersee Food Agriculture and Nutrition Innovation Center (JJK-FAN) to imagine more sustainable and socially just approaches to water infrastructure.

JJK-FAN is situated in the Southern American Bottom, a collection of watersheds that together form the flood plain for the Mississippi River. These watersheds are pivotal to the health of several under-resourced towns in School District 189, including East St. Louis, Alorton, Washington Park, Fairmont City, Centreville, and Brooklyn, IL. The American Bottom flows with a history and geomorphology directly tied to water and built infrastructure. People, plants, and animals have relied on the flood plain's rich alluvial soil. The region was once home to the Pre-Columbian Cahokia Mounds Settlement, though the Mississippi's frequent flooding may have led to the civilization's decline. Later, people felled trees along riverbanks to feed steamboat engines, resulting in deforestation that widened the river's channel. The 20th century brought expanding industries and pollutants. Industrial attempts to manage flooding, including a complex levee system, have since resulted in increased flooding for many communities.

CODE Scholars will dig into SIUE's archives to trace this history of connection between natural and built environments. Heartlands Conservancy is the area's largest conservation organization with a commitment to "balance conservation strategies with economic sustainability and human well-being." They have already undertaken plans to revitalize the Prairie Du Pont and Judy's Branch Watersheds. CODE Scholars will work with Heartlands to imagine a more sustainable approach to water infrastructure. This approach gives black and brown communities control over decision making in the management of their water systems and provides equitable access to safe drinking water, wastewater management, and flood mitigation. JJK-FAN is a catalyst for educational and professional development related to agriculture, nutrition, and food access. CODE Scholars will learn how agricultural science and policy shape communities and will see models of care and resiliency in action through JJK-FAN's educational programs.

CODES is a selective program offering full tuition for students who are Black, Latinx, Pell Eligible, or among the first in their families to attend college. CODE Scholars collaborate with community partners with the goal of creating a more socially just world. They study and address the local manifestations of global problems and share their outcomes using digital humanities methods. CODES apply methods from diverse fields, including history, literature, anthropology, biology, and sociology, for example.

CODE Scholars may design a digital map overlaying the historical realities of the Southern American Bottom with possible futures. They may also facilitate educational watershed programs with students at JJK-FAN or devise and implement infrastructures such as the planting of orchards or rain gardens.

