

SIUE launches new Justice, Workforce Development Hub

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is addressing a critical shortage of forensic scientists, advancing criminal justice research, and supporting reform through the launch of the new Southwestern Illinois Justice and Workforce Development Campus at the vacated Lindenwood-Belleville campus, in partnership with the City of Belleville, Illinois State Police, Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC), and other collaborators.

Governor J.B. Pritzker announced the project during a press conference held Monday, Aug. 15 in Belleville.

Southern Illinois University's contributions to the new campus are funded through a \$3.5M appropriation from the State of Illinois' fiscal year 2023 budget, which includes approximately \$3.2M in support of SIUE's activities in Belleville and builds upon more than two years of planning between SIUE, SIU Carbondale, SWIC, City of Belleville officials, Illinois State Police (ISP), community leaders, elected officials and additional stakeholders.

The Center will support collaboration among partners and build capacity for developing professionals to serve in various roles within criminal justice, define pressing applied criminal justice research needs, expand community engagement opportunities and contribute to workforce development.

"This initiative presents an amazing opportunity for SIUE to advance its educational mission in ways that solve pressing social problems, drive economic development and make social mobility possible for entire families," said SIUE Chancellor James T. Minor, Ph.D.. "We are proud to bring our high-quality



Belleville Mayor Patty Gregory addresses attendees during the press conference held on Aug. 15 to announce the launch of the new Southwestern Illinois Justice and Workforce Development Campus. Seated behind the podium were the other event officials, including State Rep. Katie Stuart and Gov. JB Pritzker, shown. (Photo from City of Belleville Facebook page)

degree programs and workforce training pathways to the Belleville campus to meet the needs of the community, as well as regional employers. Our initiatives will help grow a much-needed pool of forensic scientists statewide."

Specifically, SIUE has been working with ISP leadership to develop academic programming to help meet the State's need for fully-trained forensic scientists. This partnership between SIUE and the ISP Forensic Science Institute will not only address workforce challenges, but also establish research collaborations to tackle critical issues such as reducing the forensic evidence backlog, new method development and

validation, and increased efficiency.

"The current shortage of forensic scientists is a major problem for Illinois law enforcement, and it makes us less safe," said State Rep. LaToya Greenwood (D-East St. Louis). "Funding the purchase of license plate readers and ballistics testing methods partly fills the needs of police departments, but we also have to support education for the forensic personnel who work there. The new campus will create jobs and grow our higher education system, while giving law enforcement vital tools to crack down on violent crime."

In addition to the partnership with ISP, SIUE will support and enhance capacities for research, training, and

professional development for local law enforcement, regional criminal justice professionals, and others engaged in community justice efforts.

Reflecting SIUE's commitment to anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion, the Center will also house an Institute for Community Justice and Racial Equity.

"Addressing systemic racism and the web of policies, practices, and attitudes that have sustained social inequity in the region is not the work of a single institution," said SIUE Vice Chancellor for Anti-racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Jessica C. Harris, Ph.D.. "By extending services, programming, and training opportunities to Belleville, SIUE will partner with the community to actively address the ways in which racism and social inequities continue to impact our communities."

The Center will also expand educational opportunities for the region's residents, encourage degree completion, and meet the workforce needs of employers through innovative programming such as alternative digital credentials and other industry-aligned training. Over time, SIUE will offer a combination of credit and non-credit opportunities to meet the needs of both degree-seeking students as well as those seeking to upskill and advance in their careers.

Initial offerings at the Center of Justice will launch in Spring 2023 aligned with market research and stakeholder discussions. The planned forensic sciences program is still in development and a roll-out for a forensic sciences program is contingent on approvals at the campus, SIU System, and state levels.



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