



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENT
COMMUNITY & EQUITY



CECE ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024

AUGUST 2024

Summary

As one of the only interdisciplinary centers that focus on the nexus between environment, society, and equity in North America, The Center for Environment, Community, & Equity (CECE) facilitates cross-disciplinary research at American University. We aim to work with students, faculty, and community partners to chart a long-term vision, building an audacious roadmap for meeting the environmental challenges that lie ahead of our country and global community. The scope of topics we take on and the entrepreneurial approach of our team position CECE to lead in innovation: CECE is at the forefront of integrating environmental and social research, setting a standard for how academic institutions can drive meaningful change. We strive to catalyze scholarship and efforts that reach across disciplines, while driving action and public impact.

The 2023-2024 academic year was filled with new beginnings at CECE. In particular, we:

- Welcomed our new director along with a number of new team members;
- Introduced the [CECE Faculty Research Incubator Program](#) to catalyze interdisciplinary research on the environment at American University;
- Launched the [CECE Clearinghouse](#) to facilitate connections across the AU community and to communicate our work to a broader audience beyond the university;
- Hosted numerous events; and
- Finalized the new [Graduate Certificate in Environment, Community, & Equity](#), which will welcome its inaugural cohort in fall 2024.

This report documents the Center's activity during academic year 2023-2024, highlighting our new initiatives.

CECE's Growing Team

We welcomed our new director, Dr. Dana R. Fisher, in summer 2023. Upon her arrival, CECE's structure was revised and expanded. To accommodate our growing research activities and externally funded research projects, we now have two full-time program managers who work alongside our operations manager. Over the course of the academic year, CECE also added two post-doctoral fellows to the team: one fellow who is funded by AU and the other who is funded through a grant from the [American Institutes for Research Equity Initiative](#). Finally, at the end of the spring semester, we were happy to announce our new CECE Summer Fellowship, which funds two American University students to work over the summer in support of our growing research activities.



Our Team



Dana R. Fisher
Director

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W. Chris Jayko
CECE Lab Program Manager

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Kyra Jones
Operations Manager

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Rachel Weiss
Multiscale RECIPES Program Manager

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Aber Y Al-Eryani
Postdoctoral Fellow

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Julie A. Gonzalez
Environmental Justice Postdoctoral Fellow

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Magnolia Mead
CECE Summer Fellow & Research Assistant



Oluwabamise Melody Olowojoba
CECE Summer Fellow

Promoting Innovative Interdisciplinary Research at CECE

Working toward our goal of meeting the environmental challenges that lie ahead of our country and global community, CECE has expanded its research efforts substantially this year to concentrate on four areas: Climate & Sustainability; Environmental Equity & Justice; Food, Agriculture, & Land; and Water, Oceans, & Fisheries. Along with bringing in more external funding for its research projects, CECE is seeding additional research by providing seed funding and support for new interdisciplinary research projects.

To encourage more interdisciplinary environmental research at American University, CECE initiated its Faculty Research Incubator Grant Program in fall 2023. The program involves a competition across AU faculty for seed funding to support interdisciplinary environmental research projects. In its first year, two exciting interdisciplinary projects were funded: 1) The Climate Story Gaps Project: Locating Untold Climate Intersections in Washington, DC; and 2) Remote Sensing and Knowledge Co-Production in Northern Haiti.

“The Climate Story Gaps Project” is a collaboration among faculty in the School of Communication and the School of International Service. It explores how equitable representation can promote more equitable and effective conversations about our shared climate future. Dr. Rosalind Donald (School of Communication), Dr. Malini Ranganathan (SIS), Dr. Aarushi Sahejpal (Investigative Reporting Workshop, School of



Communication), and Dr. Wesley Lowery (Investigative Reporting Workshop, School of Communication) are collaborating to map out the inequalities present in the media coverage of DC residents' experience of the climate crisis. Their project is exploring how equitable representation can promote more equitable and effective conversations about our shared climate future.



Pictured (l to r): Dr. Malini Ranganathan (SIS), Dr. Rosalind Donald (SOC), and Dr. Aarushi Sahejpal (Investigative Reporting Workshop, School of Communication)

“Remote Sensing and Knowledge Co-Production in Northern Haiti” is a collaboration between faculty in the School of International Service and the College of Arts and Sciences. It focuses on co-producing knowledge about land and environment by using remote sensing technologies paired with experiential knowledge from farmers in the Haitian countryside. The research aims to understand the dynamics of rapid anthropogenic environmental change as well as continuous and hard-to-detect environmental change over time in an area with little documented environmental history. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to provide Haitian grassroots organizations with information on both long-term impacts of climate conditions as well as distinct disturbances aligned with political or social changes like displacement, land grabs, or migration.





Pictured (l-to-r): Dr. Michael Alonzo (CAS) and Dr. Scott Freeman (SIS)

CECE is also supporting two new projects that are being spearheaded by our postdoctoral fellows. Both projects are currently focusing on the DC Area: one assesses energy justice and the other evaluates climate migration.

In addition, our director brought her growing research project, “Addressing Climate Through Our Nation’s Service Corps,” to the Center in summer 2023. This project evaluates nationally coordinated service corps programs as they expand their work to care for the environment and diversify their workforces. Since the Biden Administration announced the American Climate Corps (ACC), the program is now working with various programs that are part of this ACC network to evaluate their effects on the individuals serving, the communities in which they serve, and the environmental outcomes of the projects. To date, this research is being actively funded by the Department of the Interior/National Parks Service, the USDA/US Forest Service, and AmeriCorps. We kicked off the CECE Whitepaper series that will feature the research coming out of the Center with the publication of the first paper from this project: [The 4Rs of Climate Work: A Case Study of AmeriCorps](#).

Public Engagement and Empowerment

Since public outreach and engagement is a critical component of CECE’s work, we launched the [CECE Clearinghouse](#) in November 2023. The Clearinghouse was designed as a tool to highlight the diversity of environmental work taking place across the AU campus and feature examples of the ways that members of our community are connecting to and contributing to addressing the environmental challenges we face.

The Clearinghouse profiles AU experts and their work around environment, community, & equity. It functions as a one stop shop where anyone can visit to get an overview of the breadth of environmental work taking place across the AU campus. We showcase publications, grants, events, and news from the CECE community. Additionally, the Clearinghouse features a [campus-wide Environmental Calendar](#), which is a unique source at AU for finding all upcoming environmental events.

One of the ways that CECE supports the environmental work and research happening across campus is through its Faculty Affiliates. In academic year 23-24, the CECE Faculty Affiliates list jumped to 48 members, up from 26 in the previous year. Faculty Affiliates span the AU campus, coming from: the School of International Service, the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Public Affairs, the Kogod School of Business, the School of Communication, and the College of Arts and Sciences.



Events at CECE

Events are critical to fostering relationships across campus and building community among faculty and students at AU and beyond. This year, CECE hosted five public events, reaching over 300 in-person audience members and 2.4 million online viewers. Additionally, CECE co-hosted five public events with other AU-entities during the year. Together, these events served to generate enthusiasm for collaborative initiatives, build CECE's identity on campus, and solidify our relationships across campus. CECE was excited to have [Eat the Change](#) donate beverages for guests at several events. We highlight some of the most notable events here (a complete list of [previous events from academic year 23-24 is available on the CECE Clearinghouse](#)).

Symposium on Climate in Our Nation's Service: On April 18th, as part of our ongoing research project "Addressing Climate Change Through Our Nation's Service Corps," CECE hosted the inaugural Symposium (which is being sponsored annually as part of a grant from AmeriCorps). The event welcomed the CEO of AmeriCorps along with members of the interagency team working on the American Climate Corps to discuss how nationally coordinated service corps programs can help support a green transition in the US. The public portion of this event included a National Political Overview and Preliminary Research Reflections and had over 60 in-person attendees.



Pictured (l-to-r): Yasmeen Shaheen-McConnell (AmeriCorps), George McDonald (DOI), and M. Merlene Mazyck (USDA/USFS)

A Roundtable Conversation with "Queer Brown Vegan" Isaias Hernandez: On March 7, CECE was thrilled to welcome Isaias Hernandez to AU for an informal discussion with students and the broader community. Isaias is a writer, influencer, educator, and activist who works on deconstructing complex environmental issues, while centering diversity and authenticity, and is the founder of Queer Brown Vegan. This event saw the group discussing the importance of storytelling. In an age flooded with information, disinformation, opinion and political discourse on climate change, it's important to think about how to reach people through the noise to initiate a deep and meaningful conversation—which is what the discussion on climate change needs and deserves.





Pictured (l-to-r): Ariana Lippi, Abeer Al-Eryani, Dana R. Fisher, Isaias Hernandez (Queer Brown Vegan), Estefania Orozco

ESS's 2024 Presidential Plenaries on the Social Side of the Climate Crisis: On February 29th, CECE hosted the Presidential Plenaries for the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society (ESS). The 2024 annual meeting was significant since it was the first time a regional or national sociology conference took on the topic of the climate crisis as its main conference theme. The theme was determined by the ESS President, SIS Professor and CECE Director, Dr. Dana Fisher. This event featured two expert panels. Both panels discussed the importance of including a social lens and increasing the number of people involved in addressing the climate crisis. This event drew over 120 in-person attendees.



Pictured (l-to-r): Dharna Noor (the Guardian), Melissa Finucane (UCS), Jose Bravo (Just Transition Alliance), and Dana R. Fisher

COP28 DC Climate Hub: On December 7th, CECE hosted the DC Climate Hub to take place during the COP28 round of the climate negotiations in collaboration with We Don't Have Time. Policymakers, climate activists, journalists, alumni, and academic experts came together to discuss what is needed to ensure a just and equitable climate transition. This multi-panel event included sessions on: Ambassadors Up-Close-COP28 Reflections; The Power of Storytelling; Climate Litigation; Climate Activism; Climate Optimism; A Career in Climate featuring notable AU alumni; Economic Efforts to Tackling the Climate; A Just Energy Transition; and a series of research spotlights from AU faculty. This event drew in over 60 in-person attendees and 2.4 million viewers online.





Pictured (l-to-r): Anne Therese Gennari (the Climate Optimist), Brittany Bell Surrat (Hip-Hop Caucus), and Brook Betts (Rare).

Colloquium on the Green New Deal: On October 10th, CECE held a “Colloquium on the Green New Deal” where we were joined by AU Professor Malini Ranganathan, Sunrise Movement AU student leaders Magnolia Mead and JP Mejia, and Green New Deal Network Legislative and Political Director Saul Levin. Together, they discussed the feasibility, pros and cons, and hopes of a Green New Deal. This event drew over 60 in-person attendees, including many undergraduate students.



Pictured (l-to-r): Kyra Jones, Malini Ranganathan, Magnolia Mead, Saul Levin (GNDN), Dana R. Fisher, JP Mejia

Educational Mission

In collaboration with the School of International Service, CECE developed the [Graduate Certificate in Environment, Community, & Equity](#). The certificate is currently accepting its first cohort of students.



Starting in Fall 2024, this certificate will equip students with knowledge and preparation to address a growing set of challenges at the intersection of environmental protection, community resilience, and equity. Students completing the program will become conversant with the leading theories and the connections between environmental change and environmental justice. They will be prepared to work across a range of settings that aim to integrate protection of the environment with equity and inclusion, including international organizations, governments, and nongovernmental organizations.

Looking Forward to Academic Year 24-25

Academic year 2023-2024 was a year of growth, learning, and capacity building for CECE. We used this year to build and foster relationships across campus, support internal and external research, and increase community engagement. As we look forward to the upcoming academic year, we hope to build off the successes of this past year to keep growing.

Part of our growth is dependent on fundraising. In annual year 23-24, CECE brought in \$2.6 million dollars from external sources of funding: we received \$149,000 in support from the American Institutes for Research Equity Initiative to initiate our environmental justice post-doctoral fellowship; and we received \$2.4 million dollars from the US National Science Foundation to support the RECIPES project. In the coming year, we intend to build on these successes to diversify our funding stream and support more of our ongoing operations as the center continues to grow.

Do not hesitate to get in touch: feel free to email us at cece@american.edu. Also, we hope you will get involved and invite you to join us at one of [our public events this fall!](#)





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