



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENT
COMMUNITY & EQUITY



CECE ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

AUGUST 2025

Summary

The Center for Environment, Community, & Equity continued to grow during the 2024-2025 academic year despite a challenging political and economic environment in the US. While many organizations shifted their focus away from equitable solutions to the world's pressing problems, the Center for Environment, Community, & Equity at American University continues to function as one of the only interdisciplinary centers that focuses on the nexus between environment, society, and equity in North America.

During the 2024-2025 academic year, we substantially expanded our work with students, faculty, and community partners to chart a long-term vision that builds an audacious roadmap for meeting the environmental challenges that lie ahead of our country and global community.

In particular, we:

- Expanded the CECE team,
- Diversified the research underway at CECE, and
- Kicked off two new educational programs for graduate students.

CECE's Growing Team

During the past year, the CECE team continued to grow: We welcomed a new post-doctoral fellow to focus on civic environmentalism. Funded through our grant from AmeriCorps, this addition brings the number of post-doctoral fellows at CECE to 3. With the expansion of our AmeriCorps grant, our program manager was promoted to serve as the Assistant Director of the Workforce Development and the 4Rs Project. We also continued working with our Summer Fellows from last year. Both joined our team for the academic year: one as a research specialist to support the Workforce Development and the 4Rs Project and the other as a graduate research assistant.



Our Team



Dana R. Fisher

Director

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W. Chris Jayko

Assistant Director, Workforce Development and the 4Rs Project

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Kyra Jones

Operations Manager

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Abeer Y Al-Eryani

Postdoctoral Fellow

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Arman Azedi

Civic Environmentalism Postdoctoral Fellow

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Julie A. Gonzalez

Environmental Justice Postdoctoral Fellow

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Magnolia Mead

CECE Research Specialist



Oluwabamise Melody Olowojoba

CECE Graduate Assistant

Promoting Innovative Interdisciplinary Research at CECE

Furthering our goal of meeting the environmental challenges that lie ahead for our country and global community has remained a core tenet of all the work we do at CECE. Although the funding environment was less secure, we continued to support interdisciplinary research at American University. During the 2024-25 academic year, we offered one competitive grant through our [Faculty Research Incubator Grant Program](#) (versus two in the previous year).

This year's winning project was a collaborative effort among faculty at the Kogod School of Business, the College of Arts and Science, and the School of Public Affairs entitled "Systems Lens to Increase Sustainable Procurement Success: Co-creating Insights to Bolster Employee Engagement." Led by Drs. Garima Sharma (KSB), Sarah Iverson (CAS), and Nicole Darnall (KSB, SPA), the project aims to answer the question: how can organizations bolster their employee



engagement to increase their sustainable procurement success? The team is working closely with the AU Sustainability Office to examine how the university can increase employee engagement and encourage sustainable procurement across the university. By the end of the project, the team hopes to create a systems map, share the systems map and related insights in a workshop with relevant community members, and write a report for the Office of Sustainability.

Faculty Research Incubator Program:

Systems Lens to Increase Sustainable Procurement Success: Co-creating Insights to Bolster Employee Engagement



Garima Sharma



Sarah Iverson



Nicole Darnall

The two winners of the 2023-24 grant competition are continuing to work to bring in external support for their projects. With the current funding restrictions at the National Science Foundation and elsewhere, however, it is unclear if these programs will be able to expand as we had hoped.

CECE is also home to the [“Workforce Development and the 4Rs” research project](#). This year, the project pivoted to focus on the ways that nationally coordinated service corps programs are engaging young people and older adults in disaster response, recovery, and resilience work. In addition to the funding previously received for this program by the Department of the Interior/National Parks Service, the USDA/US Forest Service, the Hewlett Foundation, and AmeriCorps, the project received additional funding from AmeriCorps during the 2024-25 academic year. These supplemental funds will support expanding our work to include mapping the constellation of service corps programs, their organizational partners, and their relationships with local communities.





Photo: AU Research team (including DataCorps fellows) during site visit with the Los Angeles Conservation Corps in July 2025.

The additional funding from AmeriCorps also supported the creation of the [DataCorps Fellows Program](#), which began in spring 2025. The program trains and supports graduate students as they work with the project's research team to evaluate the effects of federally coordinated programs that are focused on disaster response and recovery, as well as related broader civic engagement trends across the US. In addition to contributing to the project's research goals, the fellows work on their own independent research questions (more information on this program is listed below under 'Educational Mission').



Photo: AU Research team (including DataCorps fellows) during site visit with volunteers from the Jefferson Parrish, Louisiana RSVP Program in June 2025.



Additionally, CECE continues to support research led by our postdoctoral fellows. In 2024-25, these research projects included an analysis of climate-sensitive infectious diseases in coastal areas; a meta-analysis of wildfire displacement that exposes how fear, exclusion, and poor data keep impacted communities invisible; an examination of how Yemen's energy system has become deeply entangled with the dynamics of war; and analyses of the ways the climate movement has redirected its focus to protecting American democracy.

Educational Mission

In fall 2024, CECE launched our [Graduate Certificate in Environment, Community, and Equity \(CECE2\)](#) in partnership with the School of International Service. The Graduate Certificate in Environment, Community, & Equity equips graduate students from across the university with knowledge and preparation to address a growing set of challenges at the intersection of environmental protection, community resilience, and equity. The culmination of the certificate is a capstone report focused on a related area of interest for the student. The inaugural cohort was composed of five students. Three additional students are joining the cohort for the 25-26 academic year.



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WELCOME TO THE INAUGURAL
CECE GRADUATE CERTIFICATE COHORT!



Hadley Ashford



Mia Hoskins



Laurel Levin



Ari Lippi



Lindsey O'Neal

In 2024-25, CECE also kicked off its [DataCorps Graduate Fellows Program](#) to train graduate students to evaluate service corps programs that are helping communities respond to and recover from disasters, as well as to build community resilience. Over the months of May and June 2025, the Fellows accompanied the Workforce Development and the 4Rs research team to collect data through member surveys, focus groups and site visits in Jefferson Parrish, Louisiana; the R6 Region,



Utah; and Los Angeles, California. In addition to supporting the research team in their evaluation of the ways these programs are working to help their communities recover from and build resilience against disasters, each student collected data to answer their own individual research questions around governance, training, and information diffusion. Each fellow will write up their findings at the end of the program.

The DataCorps Graduate Fellows program has been funded to continue during the 2025-26 academic year.

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CECE IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE
DATACORPS GRADUATE FELLOWS CLASS
FOR SUMMER 2025:



Cici Akuley
School of International Service (SIS)



Kaitin Dellaposta
College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)



Michael Culbert
School of International Service (SIS)

Events at CECE

Events are critical to fostering relationships across campus and building community among faculty and students at AU and beyond. During the 2024-25 academic year, CECE hosted five public events, which included the launch of our monthly colloquium series. Most of these events were co-hosted with other AU- entities. Together, they served to generate enthusiasm for collaborative initiatives, expand CECE's identity on campus, and solidify our relationships across campus. We highlight some of the most notable events here (a complete list of events from the 24-25 academic year is available on the [CECE Clearinghouse](#)).

Environmental Equity, Latino Communities, and Election 2024: On October 8, 2024, CECE hosted a lively and important panel discussion on *"Environmental Equity, Latino Communities, and Election 2024."* As the organizer and moderator of the event, [Dr. Julie A. González](#) guided the discussion with a focus on fostering meaningful dialogue around the critical issues of environmental justice,



political accountability, and the Latino community's role in climate resilience. The panelists were Danielle Berkowitz-Sklar of *EcoMadres*, Elice Rojas-Cruz of *Climate Power En Acción*, and John Paul Mejia of *Sunrise Movement*.



Photo (L to R): Julie A. Gonzalez, J.P. Mejia, Danielle Berkowitz-Sklar, and Elice Rojas-Cruz

Steven Donziger: From Climate Lawyer to Political Prisoner: On Wednesday, November 20th, CECE and the Washington College of Law's Program on Environmental and Energy Law hosted AU alumni Steven Donziger for a conversation about his life as a human rights lawyer turned corporate political prisoner. Donziger began by describing his legal battles with Chevron, then moved on to discuss how we need grassroots movements to champion social change. One common note in all of Donziger's work is the importance of staying optimistic. He believes that whenever you face adversity, you can flip it around and make the best out of it. Donziger reflected on the fact that remaining optimistic and surrounding himself with community was how he survived his legal ordeal.



Photo (L to R): Steven Donziger, Dana R. Fisher, and Bill Snape



Sustainability Symposium: On Thursday, March 27th, CECE and the AU [Office of Sustainability](#) hosted the Sustainability Symposium to celebrate the depth and breadth of sustainability scholarship on campus. Faculty from across campus participated in three panel discussions sharing the relationship between Sustainability and the Civic Life, Community Building, and Service.



Photo (L to R): Megan Litke, Anastasia Snelling, Garima Sharma, and Julie A. Gonzalez

CECE Colloquium Series: In spring 2025, CECE kicked off its colloquium series. We held two colloquia in the spring semester: a discussion of Energy Justice with CECE postdoctoral fellow Abeer Al-Eryani and the School of Communication's Maya Livio; and a conversation about activism and social movements with CECE Director Dana R. Fisher and the School of Communication's Rosalind Donald.



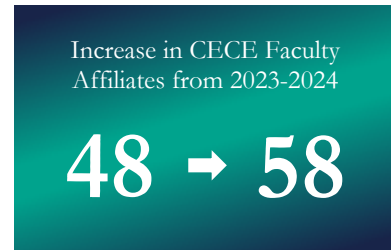
Photo (L to R): Maya Livio and Abeer Al-Eryani; Dana R. Fisher and Rosalind Donald



The CECE Colloquium Series will return during the 2025-26 academic year and will be a regular event moving forward.

Public Engagement and Empowerment

Public outreach and engagement is another core component of CECE's work, which also continued to grow during the 2024-25 academic year. The content on the CECE Clearinghouse continued to expand to highlight interdisciplinary research and education at American University. In addition, CECE Faculty Affiliates grew to include and profile 58 experts from across the American University campus.



The CECE team prioritized public engagement activities, investing time and energy in sharing their research and expertise in ways that can shape real-world decision making and support vulnerable communities. For CECE postdoctoral fellow Julie Gonzalez, these activities included a panel on “Maternal & Child Health in a Dangerous Climate,” a *Telemundo* “Planeta Tierra” [segment](#) on air pollution and community health, and *La Opinión* Earth Day [coverage](#) on environmental rollbacks and Latino communities. Postdoctoral fellow Abeer Al-Eryani presented her work on energy justice at multiple conferences throughout the year and penned a piece explaining [What Is Energy Justice?](#) CECE Director Dana R. Fisher delivered a [TED Talk](#) at TED Countdown: Overcoming Dilemmas in the Green Transition in Brussels in October 2024. She also routinely appears on [podcasts](#) and [in the media](#) to discuss her research and the work taking place at CECE.

During the 2023-24 academic year, CECE began a Whitepaper series. Our first report, “[The 4Rs of Climate Work: A Case Study of AmeriCorps](#),” which provides a framework for understanding and analyzing climate work, was published in July 2024. Papers in the series are written for a general and policy audience and provide a channel to distribute research findings expeditiously. To date, there had been 71 downloads directly from the CECE Clearinghouse of the first whitepaper. Two additional whitepapers were released in 2024-25: “Mobilizing Young People to Help Communities Recover from Disaster—A Case Study of CALCC Programs after the LA Wildfires” and “Workforce Development and the 4Rs in California and Vermont.” As papers are published in the series, they are distributed to the media and the relevant policy communities. In the 2025-26 academic year, the Whitepaper series will continue to grow.

Looking Forward to Academic Year 25-26

Academic year 2024-25 presented unique challenges, both to CECE and the world more broadly. We used this year to continue the work started in academic year 2023-24, strengthening our relationships across campus and expanding our research.

Our work would not be possible without the external funding we have been able to raise from federal sources and private foundations. In academic year 2024-25, CECE brought in around \$1.8 million from external sources, including from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the American Institutes for Research, and AmeriCorps.

In the coming year, we will continue to expand our offerings and diversify our funding streams.



Planning is currently underway to kick off a Professional Certification in Environment, Community & Equity and to build out our regular colloquium and other public events.

The funding environment in the United States has become much more difficult in recent months. Despite challenges, we will continue to diversify our external funding sources, support existing programs at CECE, and enhance interdisciplinary research and education around environment, community, and equity at American University. If you are interested in contributing to the durability of our work and supporting our efforts, please consider **[donating to CECE directly through this link](#)**.

This year highlighted the importance of continuing to support interdisciplinary research focused on the nexus of environment, society, and equity that is the focus of everything that CECE does. As many resources and outlets for this type of research and engagement close, the team at CECE will strive to continue to stay the course and double down on our work to address challenges to environment, community, & equity.

Do not hesitate to get in touch: feel free to email us at cece@american.edu.





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