



SPIn Annual Report

Siena College
Center for Academic
Community Engagement
Summer 2024

About ACE and SPIn

Siena College's Center for Academic Community Engagement (ACE) focuses on the development and success of our members by fostering transformative and impactful experiential learning opportunities through equity centered community engagement.

Every year, we run our Summer Project Incubator (SPIn) program. SPIn is an intensive program that connects faculty, students, and community organizations in multi-year interdisciplinary community-engaged research projects.

SPIn's three-year model allows for projects to grow over time. In year one, we explore issues, develop relationships, and celebrate small wins; in year two, we develop and support student and community leadership to implement a targeted intervention; and in year three, we work collaboratively to ensure sustainable action.

About The Report



The SPIn Report highlights our 2024 SPIn projects, their successes, and their next steps. We onboarded one new project this summer and supported three continuing projects. While we focus on outcomes from the summer in this report, each project continues throughout the rest of the year as members, faculty, and community partners publish results, develop research, and plan for the following summer. This year-round work is fueled by our summer program.

The report concludes with an analysis that demonstrates how SPIn significantly advances Siena College's strategic plan by driving progress in educational excellence, fostering inclusive communities, and enhancing student experiences. Our SPIn members benefit from faculty mentorship, gain hands-on experience during a summer of learning, and address needs in the Capital Region, which are just a few ways that SPIn helps Siena College lead the way.

SPIIn 2024 by the Numbers

12

Members engaged in community projects

4

Team-based community projects

11

Majors represented

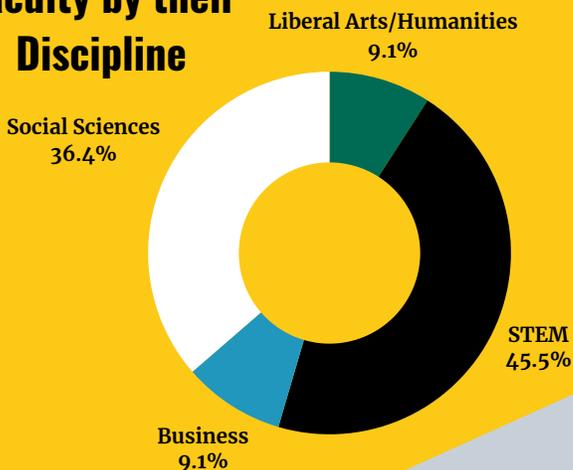
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Faculty mentors and community liaisons

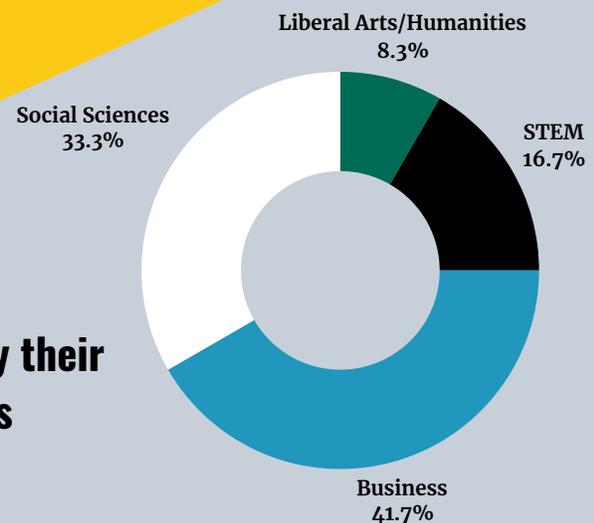
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Community partner organizations

Faculty by their Discipline



Students by their Majors



Rotterdam Needs Assessment

Y₁ Rotterdam Community Center

This summer's project continued from a spring semester cohort of members in ACE's Nonprofit Excellence and Transformation (NExT) program who developed an initial draft of a community needs assessment survey. We spent significant time building a 40-item survey that was distributed online via social media and on various listservs. Each week, we identified and planned outreach to deploy the survey through tabling at local community institutions and through the Rotterdam Community Center's (RCC) programs.

The second half of the project involved students doing direct outreach, reporting on their experiences, and sharing lessons and tips. They also created questions for a focus group that will help with further evaluating needs in the Rotterdam community. The work completed by the students allowed us to continue gathering survey responses, up from about 120 at the end of their service to about 229 by the end of the summer. Their work to create marketing materials also helped us to recruit focus group participants and set the stage for data analysis and reporting by students in NExT in the fall.

PROJECT SUPERVISORS:

Mairead Carr, MA (Siena College - ACE)
Joe Paparone (Rotterdam Community Center)

Rotterdam Needs Assessment

Summer 2024 Accomplishments:

- Created a survey and a focus group questionnaire.
- Reached out to 92 town assets (businesses, churches, and local politicians), 10 social media pages, and 23 community event organizers.
- Tabled 15 times at community events, libraries, summer meals sites, and businesses.
- Published an op-ed to recruit participants for this study.
- Gathered survey responses from 229 Rotterdam residents.

Next Steps:

- Host focus group conversations at the RCC.
- Analyze the needs assessment data in ACE's NExT program in Fall 2024.
- Write a report to share results and make recommendations for the Rotterdam community.



“I would definitely recommend this project to anyone interested in a hands-on research project that involves a lot of critical thinking and interaction with other people. This project has been very helpful to me in understanding how much effort actually goes into creating something (in this case, a survey), how much value a diverse group of people can bring to any conversation and task, and how important it is to face rejection.” - Prizma Adhikari, 2024 SPIn Member

Urban Ecosystem Justice

Y₂ The Radix Ecological
Sustainability Center

This SPIn project focuses on building community resilience and justice in the South End by increasing local food security and mutual support networks amidst the ongoing challenges of systemic racism, inequality, and climate volatility. On the direct service end, program participants engaged primarily in the maintenance of summer gardens, in surplus food redistribution/composting, and street tree watering.

SPIn members additionally supported aspects of Radix's EcoJustice Associate summer youth employment program, an urban agriculture and environmental justice-themed program for high school-aged Albany youth. The members took on teaching roles in the ecojustice youth curriculum and engaged in physical gardening activities. Through this, SPIn members maintained multiple gardening sites and spent time on youth mentorship, facilitating group discussions, and more.

PROJECT SUPERVISORS:

Scott Kellogg, Ph.D. (University at Albany - SUNY)

Brandon Costellow-Kuehn, Ph.D. (Rensselaer
Polytechnic Institute)

Stacy Pettigrew, Ph.D. (Albany College of Pharmacy)

Urban Ecosystem Justice

Summer 2024 Accomplishments:

- Maintained multiple gardening sites at Radix and in the South End.
- Supported the summer employment youth program, which included creating and leading workshops.
- Successfully led tours of Radix independently.

Next Steps:

- Continue supporting our urban farm and connecting with the community as environment stewards.
- Prepare students to present their findings at CURCA's fall research symposium.
- Work with Siena College and several other partners to extend the work we do at Radix into new directions, such as through a collaborative effort to identify flood risk and create resiliency in Albany communities.



“I joined SPIn because I wanted to get closer to the community and help share my knowledge and experience that I have learned at Siena and expand it further. This experience has increased my knowledge and understanding of environmental justice and how I can share this knowledge with other people to give them a better understanding about the environment.” - Joel Singh, 2024 SPIn Member

Medicinal Plants and Community Well-Being

Y₃ Presbyterian-United Church of
Christ/Siena College

The Medicinal Plants and Community Well-Being project focuses on building community partnerships around a deep connection with the earth, human health, and well-being. Our mission is to learn from, share with, and work alongside communities that are interested in the medicinal properties of plants that grow abundantly in our region.

This summer, our team worked alongside community members at the Presbyterian United Church of Christ, tending their large vegetable and medicinal plant gardens. Products of the garden were shared regularly with the “backstretch” workers staffing the Saratoga Raceway.

Our team also conducted qualitative research based on publicly-available podcasts to deepen our understanding of how professional herbalists view their role and educate about medicinal plants. We also hosted an herbarium workshop at Siena College, which was attended by over 10 community members, including many of Siena College’s faculty and staff!

PROJECT SUPERVISORS:

Dan White, Ph.D (Siena College)
Donnean Thrall, N.D. (Siena College)

Medicinal Plants and Community Well-Being

Summer 2024 Accomplishments:

- Conducted an herbarium workshop to the community on the benefits of lemon balm to over 10 community members.
- Created and placed plant tags in Saratoga at the Presbyterian United Church of Christ and at Siena's garden.
- Harvested plants and herbs.
- Obtained feedback from partners.

Next Steps:

- Work on a research article to share our qualitative research results.
- Continue to work with our student team members who are actively contributing to our research project.
- Identify new partners for this work.



“We all know someone who has a chronic illness, and we all know how most people end up finding out too late when the damage is already done. Then we use Western medicine to treat our illness, and it’s really more of a bandage-fix, where we’re just waiting for things to get worse. Over the summer with this project, I have learned that herbal medicine is a form of holistic medicine which focuses on maintaining a lifestyle that *prevents* illnesses. I have learned how important it is to treat my body right in the first place and how to incorporate healthy habits into my life, which is why I would recommend this to everyone.” Anum Tehseen, 2024 SPIn Member

Inter-Agency Collaboration for Summer Meals

Y₃ United Way of the Greater Capital Region

The Inter-Agency Collaboration for Summer Meals carried out a research study on the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). A focus of this research study was to evaluate the implementation of a partnership between one SFSP sponsor and a school food authority to serve hot meals, an innovative approach to delivering the SFSP in this area. Under the direction of the research leads, the students analyzed data collected from all of the surveys and identified key challenges in not only this unique partnership, but also challenges in delivering the SFSP faced by many sponsors in the collaborative.

The members also conducted a nutrition analysis of the meals served according to the type of food vendor. Using the survey results, nutrition analysis, and on-site observations, the SPIn members drafted a toolkit aimed at assisting current and potential SFSP sponsors in overcoming some of the identified challenges. The students presented their findings and recommendations to the Summer Meals Collaborative, which was very well received and appreciated.

PROJECT SUPERVISORS:

Heather Senecal, MPA (United Way of the Greater
Capital Region)

Sonya Hauser, Ph.D. (Russell Sage College)

Laura McClure, MSPH, CTR (Russell Sage College)

Inter-Agency Collaboration for Summer Meals

Summer 2024 Accomplishments:

- Visited 28 meal sites and collected more than 200 surveys from children and parents participating in the program, as well as program staff.
- Completed a basic nutrition analysis of sponsor menus and provided recommendations for improving nutrition.
- Created a draft of a toolkit, developed data collection tools, collected parent, child, and staff survey data, and made an end of summer presentation with recommendations.

Next Steps:

- Continue qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with program leadership and potential new sponsors.
- Analyze the nutritional quality of meals served further, with an emphasis on differences by food vendor.
- Continue developing the toolkit for dissemination to SFSP sponsors and those expressing interest in sponsorship.



“My service helped to contribute towards a lot of good in bridging the hunger gap in the Capital Region for children. We worked on a toolkit for potential partners and future interns. The toolkit ensures an easy step by step process to work with, so the research we conducted is helping the program to grow and improve so that they can make the Capital Region a better place for children in the summer.” SPIn 2024 Member



Leading the Way - SPIn and Siena's Strategic Plan

This section highlights how SPIn advances Siena College's strategic plan as outlined in *Leading the Way: Strategic Plan 2022-2027* by significantly contributing to key objectives in education, experience, and community.

Strategic Plan Tactic: Develop and implement innovative and important program content and instructional techniques.

Tactic in Action: SPIn offers innovative community-centered research projects that positively impact student learning outcomes. One 2024 member said, "As someone who has never worked on a research project such as this one, as well as a resident of Rotterdam myself, I know how better to connect with people and conduct research for the common good."



100%

of 2024 SPIn Members would recommend their supervisor to others

92%

of 2024 SPIn Members would recommend this program to other students

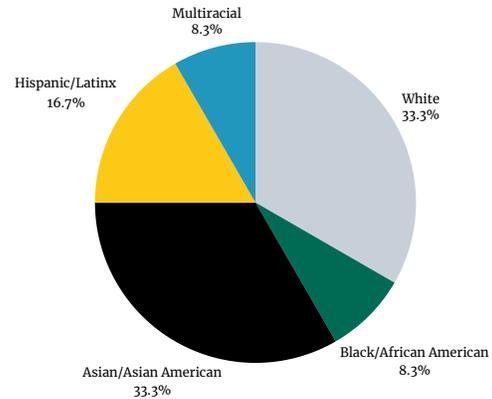
Strategic Plan Tactic: Invest in a systematic approach to student mentorship that addresses pandemic-related deficiencies, improves retention, engagement and satisfaction.

Tactic in Action: Our high-impact practices ensure that students receive mentorship, which improves engagement and satisfaction. One 2024 member says, “Collaborating with experts like Dr. Thrall and Dr. White was a privilege. They are not only highly knowledgeable but also incredibly supportive and pleasant to work with, fostering a conducive environment for learning and growth.”



Strategic Plan Tactic: Encourage experimental ideas that enhance faculty engagement and enrich student learning experiences by diversifying and enhancing pedagogy and programs.

Tactic in Action: SPIn's 3-year model encourages the experimentation necessary for innovation in pedagogy and research. As one Project Supervisor noted, "gaps have been identified and collectively met, and innovative ideas have been shared and collectively operationalized." Our members actively test ideas while conducting community engaged research, which immediately impacts our organizational partners.



33%

of our summer 2024 members are first generation college students

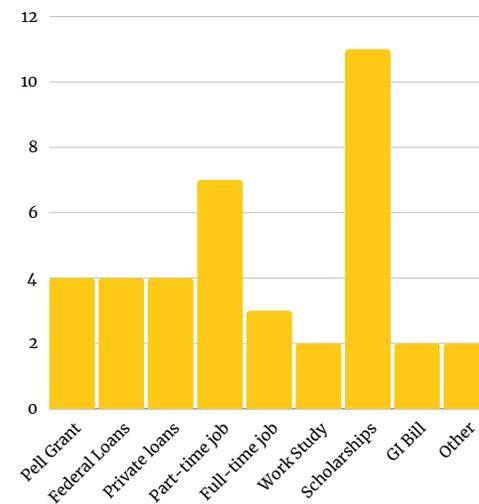


5 OUT OF 12

of our members are international students, immigrants, or children of immigrants

8 OUT OF 12

of our members identify as people of color



25%

of our members reported that they receive a Pell Grant to fund their education

Strategic Plan Tactic: Advance towards a campus community that is broadly diverse and upholds the Franciscan belief that all persons are created with inherent dignity and worth.

Tactic in Action: We recruit students who reflect the diversity of our student body, encompassing a range of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Our goal is to ensure that our SPIn teams represent the varied experiences and perspectives of our students at Siena College.

Thank You to Our Funders, Collaborators, & Supporters!

SPIn (Summer Project Incubator) is a partnership between the Center for Academic Community Engagement and the Center for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity (CURCA).

Thank you to the Siena College's marketing team for some of the photos used throughout this document!



United Way
of the Greater Capital Region





Want to Participate? Interested in Creating a Community-Engaged Project?

We would love to hear from you! Please email us at
aceinfo@siena.edu.



follow us @sienacollegeace