

ILLINOIS HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY SYMPOSIUM

OCTOBER 8-9, 2026 | SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

INNOVATING DEMOCRACY: THE ROLE OF STEAM AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2026

INNOVATION • LEADERSHIP • STEAM • DEMOCRACY

EMCEE: DR. DOMINIC DORSEY

Director of Accessible Campus Community and Equitable Student Support (ACCESS), SIU Edwardsville (SIUE)

1:00-1:20 PM

Five Years Forward: Welcome, Reflections & the Work Ahead**Dr. Dan Mahony** - President, SIU System**Dr. Sheila Caldwell** - Vice President for Antiracism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion & Chief Diversity Officer, SIU System

1:20-1:30 PM

Land Acknowledgement**Carol Samarah** - SIU System NAGPRA Coordinator

1:30-2:00 PM

Opening Keynote | Intelligence, Innovation & Opportunity: AI's Role in the Future of Higher Education**Professor Derek Hoiem** - University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Professor, Siebel School of Computing and Data Science; IEEE Fellow; scholar in artificial intelligence, computer vision, object recognition and scene understanding.

2:00-3:00 PM

Powering Possibility: Leaders Shaping the STEAM Opportunity Ecosystem**Executive Leadership Panel****Introduction: Dr. Sheila Caldwell****Opening Comments: Dr. Dan Mahony** - President, SIU System**Dr. Wendi El-Amin** - SIU School of Medicine Family Physician and Associate Dean for EDI**Dr. Terrance Jordan** - Superintendent, Springfield Public Schools District 186**Dr. Curt Oldfield** - President, Lincoln Land Community College**Dr. Jennifer Norrell** - Superintendent, Homewood-Flossmoor Community High School District**Dr. Aaron Kuecker** - Chief Executive Officer, Hope Chicago**Closing Comments: Dr. Aaron Kuecker** - Chief Executive Officer, Hope Chicago

3:00-3:15 PM

Refresh & Reconnect | Break

3:15-4:00 PM

Executive Employer Panel | From College to Career: What Employers Need from the Next Generation of Talent**Facilitator: Quentella Enty, Founder, Chief Strategist****Mandy Eaton** - President & CEO of Memorial Health**Tamara Roust** - Founder and CEO of FAIT, Cyber Security**Raquel Graham** - Founder and CEO, ROQ Marketing Group

4:00-4:45 PM

Closing Keynote | American Inflection: Education, the Algorithm, and the Future of Democracy**Introduction: Dr. Sheila Caldwell****Dr. Kamau Bobb** - Founding Senior Director, Constellations Center for Education in Computing, Georgia Tech

Immediately Following

Book Signing with Dr. Kamau Bobb

Featuring The Bullwhip's Algorithm: Artificial Intelligence and America's Racial Caste System

5:30-6:45 PM

Connections & Conversations | Symposium Networking Reception**Panther Creek Country Club** - Springfield, Illinois

Hors d'oeuvres • Bar • Networking

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2026

VISION • JUSTICE • POLICY • PUBLIC IMPACT

EMCEE: DR. DOMINIC DORSEY

Director of Accessible Campus Community and Equitable Student Support (ACCESS), SIU Edwardsville (SIUE)

8:15-9:00 AM**Morning Connections | Hot Breakfast & Networking****9:00-10:00 AM****Friday Keynote | Vision & Justice: Images and Our Fight for Equity****Introduction: Dr. Sheila Caldwell****Dr. Sarah Lewis** - John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Humanities and Associate Professor of African and African American Studies, Harvard University; Founder, Vision & Justice**10:00-10:45 AM****Advancing Equity, Attainment and Student Success Across Illinois Higher Education****Dr. Valerie A. Lynch** - Senior Managing Director, Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)**Jennifer K. Foster** - Deputy Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)

Focus: statewide SUCCESS initiative, equity planning and related student-success efforts, with connections to Illinois attainment goals, workforce needs, credentials of value and opportunities within STEM where the data allow.

10:45-11:00 AM**Refresh & Reconnect | Break****11:00-11:50 AM****The Future Is Here: Illinois Students on STEAM, Opportunity & Democracy****Facilitator: Michele Howard** - Chief Engagement Officer, Hope Chicago**Jennifer Ruiz** - University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign | Information Sciences major, minor in Data Science**Iridian Reynoso** - Loyola University Chicago | Health Professions and Related Programs**Darnell Jenkins** - SIU Carbondale | Computer Science**Joel Arriaga** - University of Illinois Chicago | Engineering**Miguel Dominguez** - Northern Illinois University | Visual and Performing Arts

Illinois students reflect on access, innovation, emerging technologies, education, workforce pathways, and the future they are preparing to lead.

11:50 AM-12:00 PM**From Conversation to Commitment | Closing Reflections****Dr. Dan Mahony** - President, SIU System**Dr. Sheila Caldwell** - Vice President for Antiracism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion & Chief Diversity Officer, SIU System**12:00-1:00 PM****Closing Networking Lunch | Building the Connections That Move Illinois Forward**

Lunch served • Networking • Continued conversation

Schedule, session titles and participants are subject to change.