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Dr. Shea

Reflection 1 – CODES 221

This semester, our project is focused on working with the Jackie Joyner-Kersey (JJK) Foundation. The goal of this collaboration is to inspire youth in East St. Louis and beyond through education, urban agriculture, physical activity, and positive youth development. The JJK Foundation's vision is to transform youth and their communities by building strong food systems, promoting career readiness, and encouraging personal growth.

My plans for the semester are to continue learning more about how the JJK Foundation combines urban agriculture with education. I want to understand how their programs help students develop skills that prepare them for the future while also teaching them about science and sustainability. I also plan to explore how these programs connect young people to mentorship, internships, and college or career opportunities. By the end of the semester, I hope to learn how community programs like this can be improved and expanded to reach even more youth.

So far, I've learned that the JJK Foundation uses urban-impacted soil to grow healthy produce and teach students about plant science. They use hands-on activities to make learning fun and meaningful, focusing on science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM). I think it's great that students get to experience learning in a safe and supportive environment, surrounded by mentors who care about their growth. The foundation also works with schools, industries, and other organizations to create opportunities for young people to gain real-world experience.

What has surprised me the most is how much impact urban agriculture can have on a community. Before this project, I mostly thought of farming as just a way to grow food. Now I see how it can be a tool to build confidence, teamwork, and leadership. I was also surprised by how intentional the JJK Foundation is about removing barriers for youth. They make sure students from different backgrounds have access to learning, mentorship, and

resources that can help them succeed. It's more than just teaching agriculture, it's about building a better future for young people and their neighborhoods.

Even though I've learned a lot, I still have a few questions. For example, how do programs like this measure long-term success? How can they make sure students continue to grow after leaving the program? I also wonder how other communities can start similar programs and what kind of support they would need from schools and local governments.

Overall, I've really enjoyed learning about the work the JJK Foundation is doing. It's inspiring to see how they combine education, health, and community building all in one place. As the semester goes on, I look forward to learning more about how projects like this help young people discover their potential and create positive change in their community.