

From the Guest Editors...

Brian Davenport and Barbara Holland



As I (Brian) think back to spring 2020 when the call for this special issue of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* went out, I am struck by how right and how wrong I was in my thinking at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we talked about the idea for this issue, I was struck by the certainty that our world was never going to go back to how it was at the beginning of 2020. As I reflect on the current reality, I am just as certain of this as ever. However, when I look at how things are now and appear to be going forward, the emerging changes are radically different from what I thought would happen. This special issue is a testament to that divergence, and the results are better than I could have imagined.

While talking through what we might do for this special issue, I (Brian again) envisioned the time of isolation and distance as an opportunity for community engagement scholars and practitioners to step back and reflect on the past with the goal of leaning into and creating the future as it emerges. This presencing that asks us to seek out “learning by sensing and actualizing emerging future possibilities” (Scharmer, 2018, p. 9) sounds lovely. It is also something that I still believe has value. However, as the past 17 and counting months have taught me, the reflection necessary for this type of learning is difficult when your goal every day is simply to find moments of thriving in the midst of surviving. As a field, we know the importance of reflection. I don’t need to remind anyone of the power and necessity of reflection. What I have learned, however, is that reflection is incredibly challenging when so much energy is being expended simply trying to move forward in the face of never before experienced or imagined challenges. Even as I attempt to look back in writing this, I am struck by how difficult reflection still is due to the challenges I continue to experience. Even as you read

this, you are likely not surprised by the idea of challenges still being a part of our day-to-day life. Although we were all challenged, so much of what those challenges were and continue to be seems to depend on our own circumstances. The reality of challenge continues to be universal, but the specific challenges themselves are definitely personal. Although there is certainly shared experience in living through a pandemic, each time I hear a story I am struck by how unique the experience was for each person. Yet, in spite of it all, we continue. Not only do we continue, but I am reminded that the work of community engagement continues to be of utmost importance because, as Pulleyblank (1999) reminded us, “community is not just an asset, but it is a necessity when life is filled with difficulties” (p. 475).

Although the challenges of the last 17 months (and counting) ensured that this process didn’t unfold as envisioned, this does not mean that there were no insights gleaned from this time and experience. The following articles are invaluable records of how the role of higher education institutions had to pivot quickly both internally and externally. Zolli and Healy (2012) described resilience as “the capacity of a system, enterprise, or a person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed circumstances” (p. 7). This description fits both the results of this issue and the field of community engagement. Every article in this issue is a testament to maintaining the core purpose of both the author(s) and the commitments that community engagement makes. For some, this meant finding unique ways to pivot ongoing research projects to adapt to the restrictions of COVID-19 while still maintaining the commitment to the core purpose of community-engaged scholarship. This can be seen in how deftly Filoteo, Singerhouse, Crespo-Carrión, and Martin shifted a participatory action research project focused on the youth sex trade in

Minnesota from an in-person to a virtual project.

The commitment to honoring the purpose of community-engaged scholarship can also be demonstrated in the fascinating work of De Bernardi, Rezende, Franco, and Miranda as they attempted to pivot an ongoing project in Brazil to a virtual setting. This was especially difficult given that many of the participants were at higher risk from COVID-19. Guy and Arthur also demonstrated ways to continue with engaged research while comparing and contrasting the process pre- and post-Covid-19. Finally, Donnelly, Toof, and Silka not only explored how to pivot research projects, but also leaned into the reality of resilience during the pandemic by exploring how previously established partnerships contributed to the resilience needed to move forward in the work.

Although several authors demonstrate resilience in their ongoing community-engaged research, this does not mean that the hoped-for reflection in this special issue did not take place. Pieces by Donnelly, Toof, and Silka and by Berkey and Lauder take a reflective approach to past practice to learn how to resiliently move into the future. Donnelly, Toof, and Silka explore how connections that were developed during community-based participatory research led to more resilient partnerships when the need to radically shift due to COVID-19 emerged. In contrast, Berkey and Lauder examine the practice of a university engagement office pre- and post-Covid-19 to understand how they shifted well and where they can continue to improve.

Resilience and reflection can also be seen in how strategically and compassionately faculty shifted their work and focus as they continued to serve both students and community in their community-engaged teaching. The need for resilience was not limited to engaged faculty. Mejia explores how faculty can continue to perform community-engaged work in spite of the limitations created by COVID-19 while also being both aware of and responsive to the challenging circumstances faced by students during this time. Adding student voice to the consideration of student experiences during COVID-19, Fry, Brown, and Sass explore how COVID-19 required students to radically shift their priorities due to the challenges created by the pandemic.

Finally, as we explore the idea of resilience in the face of significant challenges, pieces by Martin and Seru remind us that the ongoing challenges faced over the course of the pandemic were not just due to the presence of a virus. Seru shares how one Minnesota university responded to the social unrest understandably brought about by the killing of George Floyd. Adding to this is Martin's exploration of how Black and Indigenous thought can add to everyone's ability to explore and find a path forward through the challenges created by the intersection of COVID-19 and the ongoing unrest created by racial injustice.

As I (Brian again) look back over the last 17 months, I am struck by the fact that not only do the pieces in this issue all speak to the resilience of community engagement, but their very existence is a testament to the resilience of the authors themselves. As this issue was progressing, the reality of the pandemic created significant challenges to moving forward on numerous occasions. Yet, in spite of these very real challenges, each of the authors persisted, and the results add necessary perspectives to the ongoing work of the field of community engagement as it seeks to understand how best to create the future that is emerging. I am grateful that even though we all faced significant challenges, we continued to move forward. With this in mind, I offer my thanks to all the authors, to the editorial team at the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, the fantastic peer reviewers, and my editing partner Dr. Barbara Holland. All of you played important roles in bringing this issue to completion.

As we continue to move forward, I want to encourage everyone involved in the work of community engagement to continue to be resilient. As part of this, I ask you to lean on one another as you continue to navigate the collective and unique challenges all of us are facing, as I believe this is key to both the resilience of the field and our individual resilience. The multifaceted pandemic began over a year ago, and even though it created what seemed like insurmountable obstacles, we have persisted. Sadly, this need for resilience is going to continue, as it is apparent we are not yet through the challenges. However, as the scholarship in this special issue demonstrates, our ability to pivot in the face of significant challenges will continue to make community engagement a critically important aspect of the work we are all called to perform.



About the Guest Editors

Brian Davenport currently serves as director of both the Office of Community Engagement and the newly launched MS in Organizational Leadership at Eastern Washington University. After earning a PhD in leadership studies from Gonzaga University, Davenport has served as a faculty member at the University of Southern Maine as well as an associate dean at Eastern Washington University. His research interests focus on the intersection of various aspects of leadership, organizational theory, and community engagement. Finally, and most importantly, he considers it a privilege to be Nika's husband and Grace's dad.

Barbara A. Holland, is an internationally recognized scholar on organizational change in higher education with a focus on institutional change and community engagement strategies. She held senior leadership roles at academic institutions in the United States and Australia and has consulted in many other countries. Holland has been affiliated with the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities since its founding and continues today as a strategic advisor. She is a distinguished professor at University of Nebraska Omaha, which is home to the Barbara A. Holland Collection for Service Learning and Community Engagement that continues to grow as the most comprehensive repository of literature on community engagement. Her current work focuses on the development of more focused institutional strategic agendas of engagement through improved practices in monitoring and measuring engagement activities and partnerships. She resides in Portland, Oregon.

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