

From the Editor...

Shannon O. Brooks



The *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* (JHEOE) is pleased to publish its first issue of 2024—28(1)—which features an array of approaches to engaged scholarship that address timely topics and novel strategies for supporting community engagement work.

The **Research Articles** section leads off with “Amplifying Community Partner Voices in Rural Community Service-Learning Partnerships,” a mixed-methods study exploring the underresearched perspectives of community partners involved in rural service-learning partnerships. Paulson and Davis’s study identifies unique challenges faced by rural communities that—combined with many strengths—make partnerships challenging as well as beneficial for students, institutions, and community members. The authors discuss compelling recommendations for higher education institutions engaged in rural service-learning work. These include encouraging a shift to critical service-learning approaches connected to social issues important to rural communities, an emphasis on capacity building and economic development related projects, and becoming more aware of the ways anchor institutions provide access to resources that are sometimes inaccessible in rural communities.

In our second featured research article for this issue, Whaley et al. reaffirm the importance of civic education through a study examining student understanding of and engagement in the 2020 Census. This study was undertaken by a campus center for civic engagement in partnership with students in a political science course who developed the 2020 Census Assessment. This instrument was administered as both a pre and posttest to students before and after implementation of the 2020 Census Education and Engagement program, a program designed to educate the campus community about the census and encourage participation. Findings highlight the need for and impact of civic education and programming tar-

geted at college students around the census, as well as the implications for communities with large populations of college students who stand to benefit from robust student participation in civic engagement activities.

The aim of the **Reflective Essays** section of JHEOE is to present thought-provoking examinations of current issues related to university-community engagement that are anchored in the literature. Often, these essays tackle provocative topics that researchers, practitioners, and community members alike are wrestling with and untangling in their work. Ambo and Gavazzi’s thoughtful and nuanced essay delves into the fraught history of land-grant universities and Native lands gifted to states through the Morrill Act. This history is juxtaposed with the growing popularity in higher education of adopting land acknowledgements, which can be viewed as performative and disconnected from a larger conversation with Indigenous communities. Instead, the authors offer ways institutions might move beyond written statements to actions designed to build better relationships with Indigenous communities. Not only is this essay a primer on the impetus and rationale behind settler land acknowledgments, but also it challenges land-grants to go beyond these statements to engage in true restorative work.

This issue’s **Projects with Promise** section features early to mid-stage projects and research studies designed to demonstrate promising indications of impact. In our first article in this section, King et al. present a case study of the Baltimore Field School, an intensive humanities-focused training program that creates opportunities for collaboration between faculty, graduate students, and community partners in Baltimore. This case study explores two iterations of the Baltimore Field School through a self-reflexive assessment and evaluation process. Early-stage findings show promising new approaches and practical considerations for avoiding unethical, extractive, and unfair practices in university-community partner-

ships.

Further exploring ways to bolster equity and engagement principles in community engaged research, Julian et al.'s case study tests the potential use of a translational research model by university personnel working in land-grant institutions to explore and address important community issues, in this case the Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) movement. The authors argue that this study provides a framework to support the use of translational research to accomplish the mission of land-grant universities in a way that is more aligned with equity and engagement principles.

In "Refugee-Background Youth Workers as Agents of Social Change," Kennedy et al. employ a narrative inquiry methodology in a study highlighting the power of storytelling to help U.S.-born community members understand the experiences of immigrant and migrant communities. In this study, a long-term research-practice partnership between one of the authors and a center that works with refugees established The Stories Project. This project provides time for summer youth workers to engage in structured reflection activities between refugee-background and U.S.-born participants so they can learn from one another through storytelling. The authors themselves tell a compelling and valuable story of community-engaged research based a premise that storytelling can lead to change.

Building upon this theme of understanding and uncovering underrepresented voices, Allen et al. explore the impact of *promotores de salud* on the ability of medical students to more effectively provide health resources and outreach to underserved communities, particularly Hispanic communities. Promotores are community health workers with knowledge of the community being served. Findings from this study of medical students and promotores at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso indicate that interaction between promotores and students improved student communication skills with community members and their understanding of the local community, thus providing a potential pathway for medical students to serve as community educators in underserved communities with the guidance of promotores.

Finally, our last **Projects with Promise** article shifts focus to a broader public input process designed to build a new economic and natural resource asset for a region. Yeager et al. describes community asset mapping between multiple university and community stakeholders which resulted in the development of a blue economy corridor in the eastern portion of the Tar-Pamlico River Basin in North Carolina. This article describes the development of a project that celebrates the region's natural resources and assets, community engagement approaches for public input, and innovative ways that artificial intelligence can be employed in similar asset mapping projects.

Finally, the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* seeks to publish and showcase the work of emerging scholars and new voices in the field through the **Dissertation Overview** section, featuring summaries of recently completed dissertations and theses on a broad range of university-community engagement topics. Stephanie J. Brewer's (2023) dissertation explores the connection between undergraduate participation in academic community-engaged learning and mental health and wellbeing. The findings from this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis highlight themes of identity, belonging, and agency and ways that institutions support the wellbeing and mental health of students through a variety of means, including employing solid pedagogical approaches (i.e., critical reflection) in community-engaged learning. This is especially important as this type of learning can have both positive and negative impact on participants' mental health because of the real-world implications of the work students engage in.

We thank our talented editorial team, associate editors, and reviewers for their contributions to the successful completion of this issue. As always, we are honored to showcase the work of scholars and practitioners who choose to publish with JHEOE. We invite authors and potential reviewers to join us by submitting future scholarship to JHEOE or volunteering as a peer reviewer to help advance the field of outreach and engagement.



References

- Brewer, S. J. (2023). *Academic community-engaged learning and student mental health and wellness: Understanding the lived experiences of undergraduate students* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Michigan State University.

