Introduction to the Special Issue on Community-Engaged Scholars, Practitioners, and Boundary Spanners: Identity, Well-Being, and Career Development

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Will it last? Scholar Barbara Holland (2009), pillar of the field of higher education community engagement (HECE), posed the question 15 years ago in acknowledgment of efforts to institutionalize community engagement across higher education institutions (HEIs). She noted that diffusion of innovation related to HECE and enduring change would require iterative, ongoing cycles of organization development and leadership continuity to sustain progress. Holland argued that organizational change to advance HECE requires critical reflection on the very purpose and values undergirding the work by those actively pursuing it. The future of HECE, she cautioned, is reliant upon the process of measuring and reflecting on its implementation. Despite the proliferation of HECE, "questions persist as to whether the practice survives only at the margin of academic organizations" (Holland, 2009, p. 86).
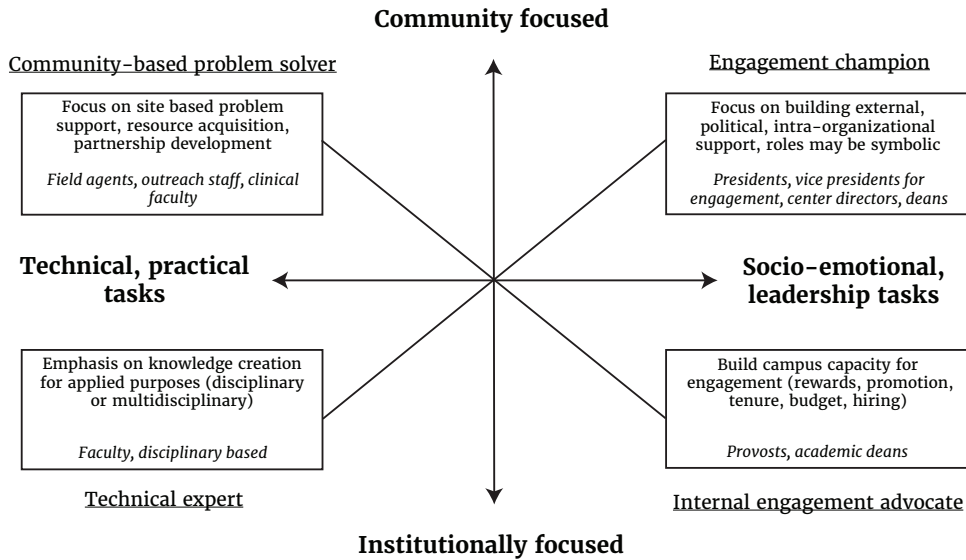
Seven years later, Post et al. (2016) argued that *next-generation engagement*, led by a new generation of scholars, would require further commitments to change leadership. Specifically, they called for transformation of "the cultures, structures, and practices of higher education" (p. 3). Post et al. went on to suggest that a primary indicator of next-generation HECE is the increase in the number of individuals who span boundaries between the academy and the community, for whom they use the term "community connector" (p. 4). These community connectors, or *boundary spanners*, are the university-affiliated faculty, professional staff, and administrators who make community-engaged activities possible (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). The continued legitimacy and value of HECE to the academy and its partners is premised on boundary spanner activity, which is honored and refined through our collective study of and reflection on the scholarly practice. Hence, this special issue on boundary spanners is intended to celebrate the sustained efforts of boundary spanners, their continued professional development, and scholarship on the role, including challenges, opportunities, and evidence-based practices. May this contribution inspire and encourage members of our professional community as we aspire to the full potential of boundary spanning and its impact on communities and the field.

The State of Boundary Spanning in Higher Education Outreach and Engagement

Organizational boundary spanning as a concept emerged from research in the social sciences and public administration before gaining traction in the field of management. The primary goal of organizational boundary spanning is to process and convey information between organizations and represent the organization to external stakeholders (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981). Weerts and Sandmann (2010) first applied the concept within higher education outreach and engagement to develop their boundary-spanning model, which includes four primary boundary-spanning roles: (1) the engagement champion, (2) the community-based problem solver, (3) the technical expert, and (4) the internal engagement advocate (see Figure 1). The individuals who serve in these roles, *boundary spanners*, are agents of the institution whose efforts advance community-engaged activities. Boundary spanners engage in myriad tasks that Weerts and Sandmann organized by task orientation (technical, practical to socioemotional, leadership) and focus orientation (community focused to institutionally focused).

Figure 1. University–Community Engagement Boundary–Spanning Roles at Public Research Universities

Community focused

Community–based problem solver

> Focus on site based problem support, resource acquisition, partnership development
>
> *Field agents, outreach staff, clinical faculty*

Engagement champion

> Focus on building external, political, intra–organizational support, roles may be symbolic
>
> *Presidents, vice presidents for engagement, center directors, deans*

Technical, practical tasks

Socio–emotional, leadership tasks

> Emphasis on knowledge creation for applied purposes (disciplinary or multidisciplinary)
>
> *Faculty, disciplinary based*

> Build campus capacity for engagement (rewards, promotion, tenure, budget, hiring)
>
> *Provosts, academic deans*

Technical expert

Internal engagement advocate

Institutionally focused

Note. Adapted from "Community engagement and boundary-spanning roles at research universities," by D. J. Weerts and L. R. Sandmann, 2010, *The Journal of Higher Education, 81*(6), 632–657. Copyright 2010 by The Ohio State University.

In practice, one's dominant boundary–spanning role may shift according to the specific needs for a given project or one's position within an institution of higher education. For example, leaders in outreach and engagement in units with limited staffing may be required to function in a more generalist capacity. Subsequently, they may experience this role shift more frequently than their professional counterparts who function in a more specialized capacity as part of a larger team. Regardless of one's roles, the boundary–spanning framework provides a shared reference point for understanding and strategically planning for the behaviors, competencies, conditions, roles, and activities that bring life to outreach and engagement (Dostilio, 2017; Purcell et al., 2021; Van Schyndel et al., 2019). Boundary spanning provides an inclusive framework through which a variety of contributors may see themselves in the interconnected web of activities that advance outreach and engagement.

Everyone within an institution has the potential to function as a boundary spanner in a formal and/or informal capacity. Therefore, our usage of *boundary spanner* is an explicit acknowledgment of the inherent value and equitable contribution of each community engagement role. This special issue includes diverse voices and viewpoints intended to raise awareness of identity, well–being, and career development among boundary spanners and their full potential in HECE.

Since Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) foundational work, interest in boundary spanning in HECE has continued, as evidenced by conference themes, workshop topics, presentations, and publications. For example, in 2013 the 14th Annual Conference of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium featured research on "Boundary Spanning: Engaged Scholarship Across Disciplines, Communities, and Geography." Nearly a decade later, the Outreach and Engagement Practitioners Network (OEPN) convened its 2022 annual workshop on "The Boundary Spanner's Journey: From Roots to Wings" to honor the rich history of boundary spanning in HECE and future trajectories. Research has expanded upon Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) initial development of the boundary–spanning model for HECE to include roles within the community (Adams, 2014; Adams & Lanford, 2021; Jordan et al., 2013), measuring boundary–spanning behaviors (Sandmann et al., 2014), capacity building and faculty development (Bordogna, 2019; Duffy, 2022; Purcell et al., 2021; Van Schyndel et al., 2019), and boundary spanning within specific disciplines and fields of study (Burbach et al., 2023; Miller, 2008; Mull, 2014; Paton et al., 2014; Southern et al., 2023; Wallace et al., 2019).

Boundary spanners in HECE navigate complex roles that are further complicated by mounting pressures in the academy. For example, nationally higher education has an unfortunate public perception problem with severe, and perhaps warranted, critiques of our value and decreasing trust in our stewardship (Braxton & Ream, 2017; Gallup, 2024; Giroux, 2006). Despite continued evidence of higher education as a public good (Fitzgerald et al., 2020; Kezar et al., 2015; Pusser, 2006), public confidence in higher education is undermined by several concerns. Chief among them are political agendas informing the curriculum, curriculum misalignment with current workforce needs, concerns about the quality of instruction, political unrest, bias and discrimination, and questionable protections of free speech (Jones, 2024; Purcell & Wells, 2020; Vedder, 2019). Many institutions face financial difficulties due to decreasing public investment through federal and state allocations, declining enrollment, and rising operational costs. These budgetary changes have resulted in increased tuition and reliance on endowments to cover budget shortfalls (Boggs et al., 2021). As a result of the increased cost of attendance, student debt is rising. By 2019, student loan debt in the United States had reached approximately $1.6 trillion (Altamirano, 2024). There were also significant disparities in access to higher education among different socioeconomic groups. Most significantly, barriers to entry and completion of postsecondary education existed for students from low-income families and underrepresented minorities (McDaniel & Rodriguez, 2024; Rodriguez & Manley, 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2023; Rozman-Clark et al., 2019).

Our collective challenges were exacerbated by the turbulence and turmoil induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to be compounded by the national racial reckoning (Kruse & Calderone, 2020; Reddick, 2023), attacks on democratic engagement (Daniels, 2021), and the erosion of community and civic engagement (Putnam, 1996, 2020; Shaffer & Longo, 2023). These complex challenges, or *wicked problems*, cannot be addressed without engaging external partners (Paynter, 2014; Tsey, 2019). Fortunately, boundary spanners are uniquely positioned to lead and support necessary change (Fitzgerald et al., 2017). In fact, these very individuals have supported students and communities on the frontlines through innumerable waves of tumultuous change, often without reciprocated support from their higher education community. Remarkably, boundary spanners remain in their positions and eager to advance community engagement efforts despite knowing it may cost them their own well-being. For many, these costs are outweighed by their commitment to the greater good and their belief that future generations will pay if they do not take the lead and sacrifice themselves, recognizing the consequences to society if they do not.

Flourishing as Boundary Spanners Postpandemic

The concept of this special issue emerged from the guest editorial team's shared and individual efforts to support boundary spanners during and after the pandemic. Combined, we bring nearly a century of boundary-spanning experience in HECE through practice and research. Each of us is responsible for professional development programming for boundary spanners, and we saw an opportunity to spur a revitalization effort among our colleagues (and ourselves) who expressed various states of weariness, withdrawal, and disengagement from community-engaged activity that was previously life-giving. The pervasive schism between core values, professional identities, and lived experience postpandemic was alarming. Out of concern for our scholarly community and the myriad communities served by our colleagues, we set out to learn: *What is needed for boundary spanners to experience renewed joy and flourish in their roles?*

The COVID Shift in Higher Education

The focus on boundary spanners for this special issue expands upon research conducted by Dr. Jennifer Purcell, professor of Public Administration at Kennesaw State University, and Dr. Darlene Xiomara Rodriguez, associate professor of Social Work and Human Services, also at Kennesaw State University, on women in the formal workforce during the pandemic who were simultaneously navigating parenthood and various caregiving roles. Purcell and Rodriguez's research on working mothers in higher education, which began in early 2020 at the onset of the pandemic, documented alarming trends in self-identified burnout and expressions of the symptoms that are consistent with it. This research revealed the significance of the compounded impacts of societal, institutional, and personal dis-

ruption on professional identities, career trajectories, and well-being.

Prior to the "2 weeks to flatten the curve" notification sent by government and public health officials and subsequent extensions of sheltering in place (Bender et al., 2023), there was a sense that the unfolding reality would be unprecedented. Purcell and Rodriguez zealously documented these impacts in real time and launched an analysis of over 500 pieces of gray literature, including news articles, features from popular media, and industry reports, to monitor the unfolding impact of the pandemic. As the pandemic spread, early reports confirmed their initial hypothesis that COVID-19 would have dire consequences for working women. Later in the spring of 2020, they formalized their inquiry and launched "Women@ Work," a study now in its fourth year. Time proved that yes, women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic (Purcell et al., 2022). In fact, the Biden administration claimed it was a national emergency, and news stories detailing the impact of the "Shecession" followed (Alon et al., 2022; Chakrabarti, 2020).

Soon thereafter was the manifestation of the "Great Resignation." This phenomenon included a mass exodus of women from the workforce as they struggled to maintain work–life harmony and were increasingly burning out (Aldossari & Chaudhry, 2021; Klotz et al., 2023). In spring 2021, one year into the pandemic, Purcell and Rodriguez facilitated a virtual session for their campus colleagues on the compounded challenges experienced by women faculty with caregiving roles, "Working Girl to Wonder Woman: Mothering and Meaning Making as Professors and Researchers During COVID-19." Participants later reported how helpful it was to simply hold space to grieve the former "normal" and acknowledge that what we were experiencing was anything but and certainly could not be sustained as a "new normal." As time progressed, the negative impacts of the pandemic remained, as was made clear through a series of conference and community presentations that Purcell and Rodriguez conducted to learn about the unfolding aftermath of the pandemic. Their work received the attention of the University System of Georgia's central administration, whereby in November 2022 they presented their research and recommendations to human resources and faculty development leaders from across the state to explore what changes could be made, considering the inequitable impact of COVID-19 on women in the academy, which further exacerbated preexisting inequities within the system.

Purcell and Rodriguez coined the term "the *COVID Shift*" to unpack the reality experienced by women in the formal workforce (Purcell et al., 2022). As of 2024, women continue to outnumber men in the U.S. higher education workforce. Nationwide, women make up more than half of the college-educated labor force, accounting for approximately 51% of those aged 25 and older (Schaeffer, 2024). This trend reflects a broader pattern where women have increasingly pursued higher education and entered the workforce in significant numbers (Fry, 2022). However, despite their higher representation, women are often found in lower ranking positions compared to their male counterparts. In higher education institutions, women are more likely to hold staff roles and lower ranking faculty positions, while men more frequently hold higher ranking faculty and administrative roles (Parvazian et al., 2017). Thus, despite the increase in representation of women in the formal workforce, inequity across managerial ranks remains.

The COVID Shift Among Boundary Spanners

Prompted by stakeholder feedback and adjacent conversations with their HECE colleagues, Purcell and Rodriguez sought to focus on a specific subgroup within higher education, boundary spanners, to create catalytic change across HEIs. Their affiliation with the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC) and its two signature programs, the Emerging New Engagement Scholars Workshop (EESW) and the Outreach and Engagement Practitioners Network (OEPN), led to an expanded collaboration with leaders of the two programs. In 2022, Dr. Diane Doberneck, director for faculty and professional development of the Office for Public Engagement and Research at Michigan State University and chair of the EESW, and Jeanne McDonald, associate director of the Office for Public and Community-Engaged Scholarship at the University of Colorado Boulder and past chair of the OEPN, joined Purcell and Rodriguez to explore these lingering impacts of the pandemic among boundary spanners within U.S. institutions of higher education.

When the boundary spanner–focused off-shoot of the research with Doberneck and McDonald launched in 2022, it became apparent that HECE professionals and community-engaged faculty were doubly challenged by the additional layer and complexity of navigating external partnerships and the trials experienced by their community partners. Because women are more likely than men to be involved in community-engaged scholarship and research, they have a double burden in relation to boundary-spanning work. For instance, a study found that 50% of women faculty members integrated community engagement into their academic agendas, compared to 43% of men (Corbin et al., 2021). Consequently, this trend suggests that women are more inclined to take part in activities that connect academic work with community needs and public good.

Since women were primarily on the frontlines of the pandemic (Rabinowitz & Rabinowitz, 2021) as well as in the higher education system (Cicero, 2024), one could surmise that they too are the ones shouldering the load to span boundaries—at their own peril. Moreover, we noted the reluctance of boundary spanners to acknowledge their burnout or ask for help. We observed colleagues beginning to withdraw from their work and leadership roles on and off campus. In some cases, colleagues left their institutions; others exited the academy, including tenured colleagues who resigned to leave higher education altogether. More alarmingly, study participants beyond our campus colleagues shared similar experiences. Our findings were also reflected in annual College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) reports on rising levels of employee disengagement, decreased satisfaction with the higher education work environment, and increased interest in and intention to seek new professional opportunities (Bichsel & Schneider, 2024).

The *brain drain* among community-engaged scholars and practitioners is also a significant concern. This phenomenon, which was clear prior to the pandemic, occurs when talented individuals leave their positions due to various factors, including burnout, lack of institutional support, and better opportunities elsewhere (Harris, 2019). Burnout and brain drain were magnified after the pandemic. For example, in a 2022–2023 survey, 64% of faculty and instructors reported feeling burned out due to work (American Psychological Association, 2024). Notably, these negative impacts were even greater among women, gender minorities, and people of color. A global study found that more than two thirds (73%) of higher education staff experienced moderate to very high levels of psychological distress postpandemic (Rahman et al., 2024). The same report spoke to the issue of job insecurity and burnout, in which about one third (29%) of staff perceived burnout in their jobs, which was associated with perceived job insecurity and multiple comorbidities. Combined, these findings substantiate initial reports of increased stress and emerging burnout during the pandemic. Similarly, a 2020 survey revealed that almost 70% of U.S. faculty members reported feeling stressed, more than double the number in 2019 (32%; Gewin, 2021). We argue that these data highlight the urgent need for higher education institutions to address the mental health and well-being of their staff/faculty to prevent further brain drain and ensure supportive work environments.

The brain drain experienced among community-engaged scholars and practitioners resulting from the pandemic and continued flux within higher education is a threat to sustaining existing outreach and engagement initiatives and efforts to deepen and expand our impact. Our data reveal these trends are consistent across institution types. The potential threat for boundary spanners is amplified for land-grant institutions, whose missions expressly support outreach and engagement (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Several implications for outreach and engagement have emerged from our research. Burnout among community-engaged scholars and boundary spanners can have adverse effects on higher education's mission, including decreased motivation and creativity among the staff and faculty who are crucial for developing innovative community-engaged projects (Lederman, 2022; Madigan & Curran, 2021). Institutions are now experiencing higher turnover among faculty and staff due to increased burnout throughout the higher education workforce (Boyd, 2023), all of which lead to a loss of experienced faculty and staff. This turnover, and subsequent brain drain across institutions, threaten to disrupt ongoing collaborative projects and impede the continuity of community partnerships.

Boundary spanners in the academy found glimpses of joy and moments to celebrate despite the surrounding chaos of the pandemic and sociopolitical unrest in recent years. The pandemic highlighted the importance of essential workers, including those in higher education. There were moments of celebration and recognition for the dedication and hard work of faculty, staff, and administrators who ensured the continuity of education during these challenging times (Culver et al., 2023). Boundary spanners also played a crucial role in supporting students and staff through various initiatives, such as virtual wellness programs and peer support networks (Donnelly et al., 2021). Despite the challenges, boundary spanners in higher education fostered innovative collaborations. For instance, many institutions partnered with local communities to provide resources and support, such as food distribution and mental health services (American Psychological Association, 2024). The rapid shift to online learning led to significant technological advancements. Educators and administrators celebrated the successful implementation of new digital tools and platforms that enhanced learning experiences and accessibility (Aucejo et al., 2020). The pandemic necessitated a more flexible approach to education. Boundary spanners celebrated the adoption of hybrid and remote learning models, which provided students with more options and catered to diverse learning needs. Virtual service-learning gained traction, building upon earlier research extolling its utility and promise (McDonnell-Naughton & Păunescu, 2022; Purcell, 2017; Tian & Noel, 2020). Faculty and practitioners worked with community partners to find alternative ways to support engagement while responding to new and ever more pressing needs (Bharath, 2020; Krasny et al., 2021; Meija, 2020). Boundary spanners pivoted and made a path forward, demonstrating resilience and adaptability. And that is worth celebrating. Still, the experience took its toll in profound ways that continue to affect our work 4 years later. Boundary spanning has led to research and innovation since the outset of the pandemic, resulting in many advancements in public health, education, technology, and social sciences, among many other fields. Even as these achievements are celebrated within the academy and academic communities, little has been done to document how these experiences impact boundary spanners as individuals with complex, intersectional identities, until now.

The boundary-spanning research focus that began in September 2022 has resulted in survey data collection and community dialogues representing over 300 HECE professionals throughout the United States. Initially, we organized and hosted community dialogues promoted as "Cathartic Conversations" during community engagement professional conferences, including the Engagement Scholarship Consortium 23rd Annual Conference in East Lansing, Michigan, and the 2023 Gulf-South Summit in Athens, Georgia. Through these dialogues, we began documenting the experiences and perspectives within our professional community. Our invitation to dialogue was often met with gratitude and surprise, as colleagues were not receiving such support and willingness to listen about their experiences and concerns at their home institutions. We were overwhelmed by stories of perseverance and cautious admissions of struggle, weariness, and defeat within the very institutional systems supposedly championing their boundary-spanning work. As a result, we were further compelled to hold space for *therapeutic sharing* and *collective meaning-making*. While planning future phases of data collection, we knew the story of boundary spanning during and post pandemic was not ours alone to tell. Hence, we proposed this special issue to collect and share lessons learned with and by a broader audience while providing guideposts for further dialogue and inquiry. Based upon data collected from the Cathartic Conversations, we identified four themes that were outlined in the call for proposals for this special issue:

- Theme 1: Boundary spanner identity and intersectionality

- Theme 2: Boundary spanner next generation career pathways

- Theme 3: Boundary spanner professional development innovations

- Theme 4: Boundary spanner wellness, well-being, and career sustainability

What was initially expected to be a temporary increase in required energy and bandwidth for higher education boundary spanning has continued as new crises have unfolded and intersected with the old ones. The data are clear: The "new normal" is not sustainable, and it is taking its toll on the workforce. Resilience has worn thin, and the broader phenomenon within the U.S. workforce has significant implications

for community-engaged practitioners and researchers. As boundary spanners, we have expanded exposure to and insight on the pulse of organizations and communities. Being positioned to aid a greater number of partners, colleagues, and students also positions us for greater exposure to expanded commitments and environments that lead to burnout. When we consider the future of boundary spanning, we cannot dismiss continued burnout and disengagement among our ranks. Moreover, we must contend with how we now plan for and work toward a better future when our foundation is fractured and shifting unpredictably. Fortunately, our expertise as boundary spanners provides a roadmap for reassessing and recalibrating our efforts individually and institutionally. Our commitment to reciprocal, mutually beneficial partnerships can inform sustainable practices that align with our values.

The Future of Boundary Spanning in Higher Education Community Engagement

When we first conceived this special issue on boundary spanning, we were confident there would be wide-ranging interest among colleagues in our professional networks. However, we did not anticipate the depth and scope of submissions and the challenge we would face in narrowing selections through external peer review and our internal editorial review. The initial call for proposals generated 69 abstract submissions. Of these proposals, 37 manuscripts were invited for submission, which resulted in 25 complete submissions that were sent for peer review. With the support of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* (JHEOE) editorial leaders, we invited prospective authors to aid us in curating a peer reviewer roster specific to the special issue. Their responses yielded 62 recommended reviewers, several of whom were not already on the JHEOE's reviewer list. Thus, it allowed those new reviewers to be vetted and welcomed into the JHEOE reviewer pool, which was also a strategic act on the part of the special issue editors. Of these individuals, 38 accepted the request to review. Through the external and editorial peer review process, 11 manuscripts were ultimately selected for this special issue. Throughout this project, we were humbled and delighted to experience the commitment of our scholarly community to advance nuanced understandings of bound-ary spanning. This was and continues to be *joyful labor*.

As career community-engaged scholars and practitioners with long-standing participation in the field, we have observed the persistent professional commitment among our colleagues, so it should have come as no surprise that this same dedication would show up in this project. Our colleagues and collaborators have sustained each of us throughout the years, providing lifelines that proved essential since the start of the pandemic and, now, during the endemic phase of COVID-19. Our shared commitment to further cultivating this community of practice was the impetus for the special issue, because *we flourish in community*. Community-building that supports belonging and well-being undergirds this project. Following Holland's (2009) sage advice, we carefully reflected on what we hoped to accomplish with the project and which values would inform our decisions. Collaboration, equity, inclusion, and sustainability were paramount among the values we sought to embody as boundary spanners and the practices we adopted. We hope readers experience our commitment through the composition of our guest-editorial team, the processes we implemented to shepherd the intellectual contributions shared with us, and the articles featured.

We are pleased to present 11 articles that speak to these values while offering nuanced insight into the lived experiences of our HECE colleagues and community partners. Each contribution illustrates the interconnectedness and interdependence of the themes originally outlined in the call for submissions. These commitments are central to the recruitment and development of the next generation of boundary spanner practitioners and scholars. Many of our colleagues examined the evolving role of boundary spanners and ways to strengthen the profession through professional development, including strategies for improving competencies, communities of practice, and the identification of support systems. Others focused on the importance and impact of the boundary spanner's work with marginalized or underrepresented communities.

The issue opens with the research article "Assessing the Boundary-Spanning Roles of Cooperative Extension Professionals in Higher Education Community Partnerships" (Mull & Jordan), which, along with

"Spanning Boundaries and Transforming Roles: Broadening Extension's Reach With OSU Open Campus and Juntos" (Henry et al.), highlights the contributions of Cooperative Extension faculty and staff whose roles and work exemplify boundary spanning as both professional identity and practice. Indeed, as both articles attest, boundary spanners in HECE often embody the dual, interconnected identities of campus and community members.

Consideration of boundary spanners' intersectional identities must be at the forefront of planning for professional development innovations, as failure to do so undermines wellness, well-being, and career sustainability. "Nurturing Community and Resilience: Four Years of Reflection on Virtual Coworking Among Boundary-Spanning Community-Engaged Scholar–Practitioners" (Clements et al.) and "Feminist Community Engagement Disrupted: Pathways for Boundary Spanning and Engagement During Disruption" (Wentworth et al.) provide examples of targeted professional development that is responsive to a particular identity group. The author teams of these two pieces represent the same institution. Thus, this pairing of articles demonstrates how successful programming can emerge organically and be sustained by a grassroots effort for institutionalization that can coexist with formal structures to meet different needs among various stakeholders within the same university.

"Re(building) Trust with Indigenous Communities: Reflections From Cultural Brokers" (Riley & Kaneakua) and "A Call for 'Insider' Community-Engaged Research: Considerations of Power Sharing, Impact, and Identity Development" (Blodgett et al.) validate the importance of recognizing how boundary spanner identity and intersectionality impact research collaborations with community partners. Similarly, "Community-Engaged Scholars' Boundary-Spanning Roles and Intersected Identities: Korean Dual Language Bilingual Education Program in a Public Elementary School" (Choi et al.) provides an example of community-based programming through which researchers may be challenged and supported by shared identities with community partners. The case study also highlights the importance of candid and open dialogue in strengthening campus–community partnerships and research collaborations.

Recognizing and celebrating the diversity of intersectional identities enables us to next consider organizational practices that cultivate boundary spanning. For example, "Developing a Strategic "Container" to Support Boundary Spanning and Belonging Amongst Diverse Collaborators at a Land-Grant University" (Garcia et al.) introduces "dialogue containers" and appreciative inquiry, among other approaches, as strategic learning and development interventions for boundary spanners. Similarly, "Collective Impact as a Novel Approach to Seeding Collaboration for Boundary Spanning" (DiEnno et al.) provides a framework through which reflexivity and shared meaning-making may bolster university–community collaborations. The importance of reflective practice is further exemplified in "Fluid Practices of University–Community Engagement Boundary Spanners at a Land-Grant University" (Payne et al.). This piece reveals how one's understanding of their boundary-spanning practice is refined through interactive cycles of experience and reflection. This reflective essay also notes the need for continued examination of existing models and frameworks, thereby inviting scholars to further refine models as we deepen our understanding of identity, collaboration, and sustainability within the field.

Finally, in "It Takes a Village to Raise a Science Communicator" (Frans), the author skillfully and creatively provides a metaphorical heuristic for mapping the necessary support for doctoral students pursuing community-engaged research. We are especially pleased to include this reflective essay as inspiration for next-generation scholars and a call to action among established boundary spanners to provide the mentorship needed to sustain and advance the field.

These articles give voice to the lived experience of boundary spanners and honor the sustained dedication throughout the field of HECE. They reflect our collective efforts in advancing the thinking and practice of boundary spanning in HECE. Our work is not without difficulty, yet there is much to celebrate. We are therefore delighted to feature the innovative practices, research, and reframing of barriers presented in this special issue and hope it inspires next-generation boundary spanners and (re)ignites passion for our work.

In closing, we invite readers to consider how "iron sharpens iron" and investment in ourselves and our professional communities is a worthy endeavor. In *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*, Levine (2013) argued that our transformational shifts occur through "conscious development, and not just random change" that is both "relational and collaborative" (p. 61). Boundary spanners understand the importance of cultivating community, which includes our scholarly community. May our collective efforts be intentional, deliberate, and informed by an ever-expanding awareness of how we may better help one another as colleagues and citizens *flourish in community*, and may this special issue inform those efforts.

About the Guest Editors

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