

From the Editor...

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As we head into autumn, we welcome another issue of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* (JHEOE). In Issue 29(3), our **Reflective Essay** section is prominently featured, presenting a series of thought-provoking articles that examine current issues in university-community engagement. These essays are anchored in the literature and frequently include calls to action for engaged scholars and practitioners. They offer much food for thought on issues ranging from institutionalizing community-engaged learning and providing tangible support for engaged scholarship, to pandemic pivots worth maintaining in our practice.

We begin this issue with a featured **Research Article**. Blostein et al. present a multiyear evaluation of a third-year undergraduate course in Community-Engaged Experiential Learning (CEEL) within International Development Studies at the University of Guelph. At this institution, CEEL blends experiential learning with community-engaged principles of reciprocity, critical reflection, and justice to align student projects with community-defined priorities and foster global citizenship. Through CEEL, students gain practical, interpersonal, and professional skills, while also contributing to stronger university-community relationships. This study provides a model for integrating community-engaged and experiential learning at other institutions and emphasizes the importance of engaging students in critical reflection as a means of understanding their roles in international development.

Our first **Reflective Essay**, by Talley et al., explores the evolving role of public engagement in higher education, highlighting major challenges for institutions and scholars. The authors remind readers that although public engagement has the potential to strengthen eroding public trust,

it is often messy, political, and constrained by bureaucracy and academic reward structures. This essay calls on universities to prioritize initiatives that provide sustained faculty support rather than efforts that may appear merely performative.

The next essay continues the theme of increased institutional support for engaged scholarship. Rios and Saco argue that institutional recognition of community-engaged scholarship can serve as an effective strategy for rebuilding public trust in higher education. Using a social-ecological framework (individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy levels), the authors offer strategies for supporting and rewarding engaged scholarship that are instructive for many other institutional contexts.

Similarly, Cornish and Gassman examine the disconnect between community-engaged scholarship and traditional tenure and promotion metrics. Their essay employs first-person narratives from two women academics engaged in deep community partnerships. Despite gradual progress across higher education, prevailing tenure and promotion norms continue to prioritize publication counts over public engagement. The authors contend that this emphasis can negatively affect faculty well-being and productivity, with disproportionate impacts on women and faculty of color. They call for the creation of “engagement-ready” institutions and argue that valuing community-engaged work benefits institutional equity, faculty retention, and the public relevance of higher education.

Next, Izadi et al. address the literature on the “third mission” of universities, defined as societal engagement beyond teaching and research. They argue that the definition, scope, and metrics of the third mission remain fragmented, despite growing recognition of its importance. Through a qualitative metasynthesis of 32 studies, the authors identify six approaches to the third

mission. This study offers key insights for agricultural and land-grant universities seeking to strengthen their third mission activities.

Motley et al.'s reflective essay synthesizes lessons from the International Service-Learning Network (ISLN), a community of practice between faculty from the United Kingdom and United States established during the COVID-19 pandemic to sustain and reimagine service-learning amid campus closures, political turmoil, and heightened attention to racial injustice. Members documented rapid pivots to digital environments and ongoing challenges such as student fatigue and mental health concerns. Despite these challenges, the essay distills postpandemic best practices and makes a compelling case for continuing innovative pandemic-era adaptations to make service-learning more accessible and resilient.

The final reflective essay explores parallels between critical disability studies and community-engaged learning, as both approaches prioritize lived experience, value community expertise, and connect classroom theory to social change. Santinele et al. describe lessons learned from a Canadian disability studies practicum program and its alignment with community-engaged learning goals. This essay offers meaningful connections to disability studies literature and inclusive practice that can inform community-engaged scholarship.

The **Projects with Promise** section highlights early- to midstage research studies or program evaluations that showcase promising practices and programs with potential to open new avenues for scholarship. In this issue, these articles examine approaches to institutionalizing service-learning and community-engaged learning through faculty development programs, as well as an innovative university-K-12 partnership in a rural community.

Leading off this section, Covington et al. investigate Christopher Newport University's (CNU) efforts to embed community-engaged learning (CEL) as a core part of its curriculum. CNU's CEL approach seeks to repair strained community relations while fostering justice-oriented partnerships in which students, faculty, and community members collaborate as colearners. At the center of this effort is the Tidewater Faculty Fellows program, a yearlong fellowship that trains

faculty across disciplines to design and teach CEL courses. Through faculty reflections, the authors identify both challenges and transformative shifts in practice and partnership. They argue that embedding CEL into the university's core curriculum is essential for rebuilding public trust in higher education, supporting student development, and creating more equitable, sustainable community relationships.

Similarly, Strahler et al. examine Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) at Slippery Rock University (SRU) as a method for institutionalizing service-learning pedagogy and building an engaged campus. Grounded in a six-attribute framework for implementing FLCs, their evaluation highlights how structured faculty development strengthens service-learning and supports broader institutional cultural change toward engagement.

The final project with promise article describes the first phase of a community-engaged partnership between Texas Tech University and rural West Texas K-12 schools. Lammert et al. conducted a needs assessment using an assets-based framework that engaged teachers, administrators, families, and community members. The assessment revealed both challenges (e.g., teacher shortages, limited housing, funding disparities, lack of broadband) and assets (e.g., small class sizes, community cohesion, cultural pride). By grounding the work in a rural cultural wealth framework, the project rejects deficit views of rural education. The authors argue that beginning with community strengths fosters more sustainable and equitable outreach and engagement.

The **Dissertation Overview** section of JHEOE features summaries of recent theses and dissertations on community engagement and highlights emerging voices in the field. We aim to expand this section in the coming years to better represent the scale and scope of graduate student scholarship in community engagement and welcome submissions or recommendations for recent studies. To conclude this issue, Van Schyndel examines how graduate students develop professional identities as community-engaged practitioner-scholars through the Imagining America PAGE Fellows program. Interviews with alumni revealed that although students often faced tensions and a lack of institutional support, professional associations can provide affirming communities of practice that foster graduate student well-being.

As always, we extend our gratitude to the many authors, reviewers, associate managing editors, and the editorial team who make publishing JHEOE possible. We appreciate your investment of time and interest in the scholarship featured in this issue, and we thank you for your continued readership.



