

From the Editor...

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I am pleased to present 2025's final issue of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* (JHEOE), Volume 29, Issue 4. This collection highlights the many ways higher education institutions partner with communities, ranging from examining student identity development through community engagement and the creation of assessment tools to the role of rural colleges as anchor institutions. The articles featured in this issue explore the nuances of service-learning in multiple contexts, the internal power dynamics inherent in grant-funded engaged research, and the transformative impact of longer-term higher education access programs. Together, these contributions offer a comprehensive look at how scholars and practitioners are navigating collaborations between the academy and the public sphere to foster more reciprocal, sustainable, and impactful engagement.

Building on these overarching themes, the **Research Articles** section opens with a focus on civic identity development. Leading off this section is "Authoring civic identities in figured world," Kaligotla's case study which draws on theories of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Kegan, 1982, 1994) and figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) to understand how civic identity is developed through curricular community engagement. This study identifies five phases of development during which students integrate college and civic experiences into their identity.

Transitioning from theoretical frameworks of identity to the practical need for empirical measurement, Tantia et al. present "Development and validation of Service-Learning Experience Scale." This article charts the creation of a new instrument tested with 290 students in India, moving beyond student learning outcomes toward a holistic measurement of student development. The result is the Service-Learning Experience Scale (SLES), a tool designed as a multidimensional measurement of students'

service-learning experiences. This article provides a robust overview of previous literature about existing instruments along with a study examining the utility of the SLES for institutions, faculty, and partners to use to interpret the impact of service-learning.

While these first two studies focus on the student experience, our final research article shifts the lens toward higher education's impact on rural communities. In "Rural anchor institutions: How rural public colleges support the well-being of rural people and communities," Jenks et al. flip the script on the typical study focused on urban-serving anchor institutions by examining the characteristics and missions of Rural Public Colleges (RPCs) and their importance and functioning in rural communities through an anchor institution lens. Findings demonstrate that RPCs function as anchor institutions in crucial ways, including providing postsecondary access, employment, and development of unique economic activities specific to rural communities. By examining RPCs through the anchor institution lens, the authors demonstrate how these schools are vital to postsecondary access, local employment, and rural public health.

Projects with Promise are early-stage descriptions of projects and partnerships that describe preliminary research and evaluation, plans for sustainability, and lessons learned for future research. The first article in this section provides an overview of the Rutgers Future Scholars Program and its impact. Gale et al. describe a college access program that partners with five school districts across New Jersey to provide a range of programming for first-generation students designed to increase college access and attainment. Evaluation of the impact of this program demonstrates a positive impact on psychosocial outcomes—such as grit, perseverance, and communication—and the educational achievement of participating students.

This article is followed by a study by Hodge

et al. that examines student participation in the Shelter Crew Program, which provides an opportunity for students to volunteer with Catholic Charities Shelters serving individuals experiencing homelessness in a course employing critical service-learning pedagogy. In this study, students' written reflections and focus groups illustrate changes in student perception related to their understanding of homelessness and their interest in continuing to engage and volunteer.

Our final Project with Promise article is a unique piece by a student participant in a community-engaged learning (CEL) course at Gonzaga University co-authored with his faculty advisor. Noah reflects on his experience as a student in Foundations in Sports Outreach, a CEL course partnering with Gonzaga Family Haven, and how this experience led him to coordinate a sports outreach program as part of his honors project. This article fills an important gap by providing insight into the multidimensional learning that takes place in these experiences and impact of CEL beyond the classroom.

Finally, this issue concludes with our **Reflective Essay** section, which moves from specific projects to broader critiques of the field's professional and research practices.

Denny et al. lead off this section by exploring the intersection of grant writing and public engagement, proposing a framework that prioritizes ethical, collaborative project development from the design phase.

Deepening this look at internal university dynamics, Chikkatur and Oliver explore the power imbalances between faculty and staff involved in grant-funded participatory action research (PAR), questioning who receives recognition for the labor of engagement. The issue then concludes with Adelaja's essay on expansive public-private research collaborations. Drawing on the author's experience, the piece examines "boundary activities" at the nexus of the university, government, and private sectors that result in innovative entrepreneurial activities.

As always, we extend our gratitude to the many authors, reviewers, associate and 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.



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