

### ***Note from the Guest Editor . . .***

Research documents the ways in which an educated citizenry is vital to the social, political, and cultural vibrancy of our communities. Education provides a broader range of job opportunities, and a number of social benefits, including healthier lifestyles and longer life expectancies, lower crime rates, and reduced reliance on public assistance programs. What this brings to light is the significance of the public service mission of higher education and the importance of providing access to the broadest range of audiences possible.

As is our annual tradition, this special fall issue of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* is dedicated to the national Outreach Scholarship Conference. The majority of the papers included in this issue came in direct response to the 2007 conference theme, *Access through Engagement*. Held October 7-9, 2007 in Madison, Wis., the 2007 Outreach Scholarship Conference served as a platform for discussion and debate by participants from 81 institutions from 37 states. We at the University of Wisconsin-Extension were pleased to host another successful conference, as it provides a venue for scholars and practitioners to tackle an array of complex issues that address critical societal needs.

As in previous years, the host institution served as the guest editor for this special issue. UW-Extension is proud to take on that role this year. Naturally, we couldn't have done it without our conference co-sponsors: The Ohio State University, the Pennsylvania State University and the University of Georgia. Without them, our conversations remain nothing but dialogue. Our partnership is now even richer with the addition of North Carolina State University, Michigan State University, University of Kentucky, the University of Alabama and Purdue University. As guest editor, I sincerely hope these articles spark additional dialogue that can move us forward in our efforts to promote your thinking around your institution's public service mission and your personal role in providing access to all the university has to offer.

Providing equal access to resources is not something to take lightly. As Frabutt, Cabaniss, Kendrick and Arbuckle's "A community-academic collaboration to reduce disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system" reminds us, disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system requires community intervention. James Zuiches' reflective piece, "North Carolina State University: Building partnerships with urban communities" closely examines a single university's approach to addressing the challenges facing an urban community in 2008. By contrast, in "Working together to protect ecological

diversity: A community based learning case study at University of Wisconsin-Parkside,” Wolf and Statham examine a community-university partnership to protect a threatened maple-beech forest at a small Wisconsin campus.

Yet in “The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning,” Tryon and Stoecker challenge us to improve our partnerships with better communication. This paper finds partnerships have room for improvement in several key areas: communication and relationship-building; managing and evaluation of students; cultural competency; and short-term service learning.

Faculty are crucial to the success of university-community partnerships. They can foster positive change through dialogue, as Olivos argues in “Public deliberation and civic engagement on issues of diversity in higher education,” and they can inspire an entire community as Merryman and Bindas’ “Invisible struggles: A civil rights project impacts classroom and community” reveals. Finally, in “Prison arts and faculty engagement: A recipe for improving college teaching,” King-Jupiter, Stevens and Bondy demonstrate the ways in which departmental support and college leadership, in addition to policy changes, significantly influence the ability of faculty to remain engaged in outreach work.

Two articles pertain to school-community programs and creating better links to education and health care. In “The big sky model: A regional collaboration for participatory research on environmental health in the rural west,” Ward, Vanek, Marra, Holian, Adams, Jones, and Knuth show how new educational models can guide high school and tribal college students from the rural areas of Montana and Idaho in their understanding of chemical, physical, and environmental health concepts. Hicks Judd and Howell Adams’ “Lessons learned from a decade in a university community partnership: Keys to successful engagement and outreach” identifies the factors successful in a community-based partnership for meeting the health related needs of rural children.

Fort, Reider, and Jones’ “The volunteer income tax assistance student program: Are we creating a dependence on the service?” research questions whether unintended outcomes outweigh the intended benefits of a program. And, in “An approach to addressing the economic accountability challenge,” McCorkle and Anderson present a way of demonstrating the economic benefits and impacts of Cooperative Extension programs in order to justify its funding in light of increasing demands on state and federal governments in allocating scarce public funds.

A special section for this year's journal includes articles from the five regional winners of the C. Peter Magrath/W.K. Kellogg Foundation Engagement award. In recognition of former National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) President Magrath, the award acknowledged academic efforts that promote engagement as an integral part of the roles and responsibilities of public universities and their faculty. These articles: a "A small university helps small farms, addresses big problems;" "The Connecticut Center of Excellence for Eliminating Health Disparities among Latinos;" "Engaged partnerships improve lives;" "An anatomy of a community/university partnership: The structure of community collaboration;" and "Answering the question of how: out-of-region university engagement with an economically distressed, rural region" are examples of how an engaged university enriches the student experience.

As these articles reveal, the challenges facing institutions in their outreach mission are complex. The need for outreach scholarship has never been greater. The call for work documenting the value of how academic outreach adds to the social, political, and cultural strength of our communities is reaching a new high. Through the articles in this special issue of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, I hope you will advance your work with new enthusiasm and fresh insight.

Amy J. Pikalek  
Guest Editor  
University of Wisconsin-Extension  
Continuing Education, Outreach and E-Learning