

From the Editor...

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In a thought-provoking **Reflective Essay** featured in this issue of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, David Meens examines the persistent tension between scholarly discourse around community engagement and the “semantic drift” that occurs as institutionalization takes hold. Meens addresses critiques that the Carnegie Foundation’s definition of community engagement fails to fully represent institutional reality, noting:

Simultaneously, institutional actors continue to expand the definition’s application to activities that stretch its conceptual boundaries, using engagement language to describe everything from economic development initiatives to marketing campaigns. This expansion reflects both the definition’s positive valence and its conceptual limitations in distinguishing between different types of university–community relationships. (p. 115)

Ultimately, Meens presents a “strategic adaptation” approach, encouraging us to remain active in institutional dialogues and embrace the evolving nature of our scholarly language through intentional practice. However, the tension he discusses resonates throughout this issue of JHEOE as contributors grapple with shifting terminology and institutional priorities in the featured articles.

In our **Research Articles** section, Haddock et al. address the ways in which universities are increasingly pressured to demonstrate value through student success metrics. By focusing on Community Connections (CC) courses at Colorado State University, the authors move beyond civic attitude surveys to examine the impact of service-learning on student success measures such as GPA and graduation rates. Utilizing propensity score matching, this study’s findings reveal that service-learning has a pronounced positive impact on underserved and first-generation

students, providing evidence that engagement can be a core strategy for promoting student success.

In comparison, Frey et al. turn their attention inward to the student’s developmental journey in “An Expectation of Care: Flexible Emergence of Students’ Critical Consciousness in a Community-Based Writing Project.” Recognizing concerns that service-learning can inadvertently reinforce charity mindsets, the authors track a 4-year project at a Jesuit university. Drawing on Cipolle’s (2010) stages of critical consciousness, they introduce “flexible emergence,” a framework that views social justice perspectives as a fluid, incremental process rather than a single-semester destination. Their work opens a sympathetic space for practitioners to support students through this journey, viewing it as a long-term developmental continuum rather than a linear process.

Our **Projects with Promise** section highlights innovative initiatives across diverse institution types. In Prenshaw et al., “Neighborhood Revitalization Through Entrepreneurship Education: A ‘Small’ Anchor Institution’s Strategy and Impact,” the authors examine Millsaps College’s ELSEWORKS initiative. This model demonstrates how a small anchor institution can have a large impact by utilizing student-led consultations to revitalize a local creative economy, while remaining sensitive to community displacement.

Two subsequent articles in this section focus on the transition from education to the workforce. Coppola and Nellis share findings from the Tomorrow’s Workforce project in Indiana, which created dual-enrollment and work-based learning pathways to address regional gaps. In the realm of health, Kenkare et al. evaluate a partnership between the Oakland University Beaumont School of Medicine and a Hispanic youth nonprofit, measuring the impact on mentees’ health-literacy and social outcomes.

Sustainability and resilience are also re-

curing themes in this section. Payne et al. reflect on a 20-year student grant program at Purdue University, illustrating how re-envisioning evaluation can enhance reciprocity and align with a land-grant mission. To round out this section, Tyson and Mleta provide a retrospective on the COVID-19 pandemic, examining a pilot tutoring program. They explore how this project also influenced the career trajectories of university students, offering lessons on crisis-driven engagement.

This issue also features an additional **Reflective Essay** contributed by Cunningham et al. which focuses on the unique responsibility of R1 universities. They present a model for how high-level research and engagement can intersect, offering a roadmap for evolving into “high-research, high-engagement” institutions.

To conclude, we feature two **Book Reviews** offering practical roadmaps for student

engagement and engaged scholarship. Plaxton-Moore reviews *Preparing Students to Engage in Equitable Community Partnerships: A Handbook* (Tryon et al., 2023), emphasizing scalable tools to help students navigate power dynamics and cultural humility. Dush examines *The Routledge Companion to Public Humanities Scholarship* (Fisher-Livne & May-Curry, 2024), which documents the “nuts and bolts” of sustaining public projects and broadening institutional definitions of scholarship. Together, these book reviews offer tangible strategies for fostering intentional, community-centered work.

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



References

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