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Editor's Message: JCES Keeping Pace With Rapid Changes in the Field

Cassandra E. Simon
University of Alabama

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These Are Exciting Times as *JCES* Keeps Pace With Rapid Changes



With each issue of the *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship (JCES)*, it seems there is something new and exciting to share. The current issue is no different. Yet this time the excitement comes not directly from *JCES* but from the advancements in the field of engaged scholarship since the inception of *JCES*. As editor of the journal, I have been fortunate enough to see the wide range of scholarly works done in the name of engaged scholarship. And although these manuscripts reflect work conducted in an array of disciplines, using a variety of approaches, they represent an exciting movement in the field of engaged scholarship and, consequently, *JCES*. The field is moving forward, and therefore so is its state of knowledge and the quality of associated works. Combined with its ongoing commitment to contributing to the common good, engaged scholarship is well poised to make significant contributions to how we teach, learn, live, and serve.

Quality research is always at a premium, and I am pleased to say that not only do I see an improvement in the overall quality of the manuscripts we are receiving, but I also see improved quality in the methodology associated with them. Although differences in how rigor is defined may fluctuate based on discipline, what is evident is that engaged scholarship is gaining prominence across and within disciplines throughout the academy. As such, there is also a depth in the type of knowledge building taking place, even when compared to three short years ago. For an area to grow and develop knowledge, it must test the known and the unknown, the abstract and the concrete, and the theoretical and practical. Engaged scholarship continues to demonstrate its ability to build its own knowledge base, and we at *JCES* are proud of our continued role in helping that base develop. At the risk of letting my personal bias show, I am especially excited about a stronger emphasis on the social justice, action-oriented aspect of engaged scholarship. Words like action, partnership, mutual benefit, justice, and service remain prominently connected to the purpose, interpretation, and application of community-engaged research. More so, the importance of the “meaning of the research” is increasingly seen as a critical and necessary consideration in assessing the value of this research. Contemporary engaged scholarship extends beyond the traditional “So what?” to “Who does this help?” and “How does this help?”

This issue of *JCES* is reflective of so much of what is going on in engaged scholarship that is exciting. It is filled with examples of innovative, forward-thinking approaches to addressing complex issues through connecting communities, students, and faculty. The action orientation roots of engaged scholarship are reflected in many of the manuscripts in this issue. Addressing issues like the health risks posed by STDs and AIDS in the college community and the implementation of a wellness policy for a rural public school system demonstrates a social justice aspect of this scholarship. Another manuscript is a reminder of the struggle within the academy regarding the role of engaged scholarship in the retention, promotion, and tenure of faculty, encouraging that a stand be taken—and not only that, pointing the way to how it can be done. Yet another demonstrates effective use of community-based participatory research, representing the action orientation of community engagement work.

Additional manuscripts address the influence of service-learning on career choice and how engaged scholarship has built on strengths of the Hispanic/Latino culture to raise ACT scores and helped to develop a mutually beneficial, culturally sensitive language instruction program, along with a mentoring and tutoring program. Commentaries by both a student and community partner remind us of the relevance of this work in the lives of everyone around us. So, I invite you to read this issue of *JCES* and provide us your feedback at jces@ua.edu. As always, an extraordinary thank you to the *JCES* editorial board and staff whose hard work makes each issue of *JCES* a reality.