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Message from the Editor: The Year of Less Is More

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The Year of Less Is More

From the Editor

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Greetings and happy spring from the *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*! I am writing this column in my home office in south Louisiana; from my chair, I can see that all the trees in my backyard have fully budded out. I am also watching two Carolina wrens working hard on building a nest on the back porch. Spring is a time of transition and of dynamic change.

I am in transition myself; on December 31, 2018, I stepped down from serving as the director of LSU's Center for Community Engagement, Learning, and Leadership, after serving in this 50% time administrative capacity for eight and a half years.

I've been a faculty member for twenty-two and a half years, long enough to recognize that I've experienced several "career chapters." I realize that at this moment, I am in one of those "between chapters" places. I also know that I tend to work "nose to grindstone" for long periods of time, like the line in the Steve Winwood song "Back in the High Life": "But when you're born to run it's so hard to just slow down."

And so in this current transition, I am endeavoring to be fallow on purpose, that is, to tie up a couple of things I've been working on, while making a conscious effort to NOT jump into the next thing just yet—even though I know what it is.

My motto for spring 2019 (and I'm contemplating making it my motto for the entirety of 2019) is "less is more."

I had the pleasure of listening to Tania Mitchell during a conference keynote, where she talked about surveying former civically engaged students years later, and finding that, at least in the eyes of Tania and her colleagues, these former students were living admirable lives of service as professionals and citizens. And yet, almost all of this cohort talked about how they weren't doing enough, and weren't satisfied with their actions. Tania shared that this result made her wonder if we as civic engagement practitioners inculcate part of that ethos—that what you do is never enough. Her story has made me wonder as well—and I'm sitting with these thoughts in this fallow, in-between space.

At another conference, I was able to interact in a small discussion group with Julie Hatcher, who spoke about how her career was centered around the critical importance of structured reflection. And how, after many years of being ensconced in this paradigm, she has come to the conclusion that the unstructured, unscripted conversation can be every bit as transformative as the structured, scripted one. She came to this conclusion because in her research, people often cited an unstructured, unscripted conversation as the epiphany that led them fully into engagement.

Her story reminds me that sometimes, it's the things that you don't intend that wind up being transformative, like the way that a child will play with the box rather than the toy inside it. Or the way that the pool at the hotel is more fun than the trip to Disney.

Being deliberate about being unscripted has already felt, to this point, like something of a Renaissance, and a taking back of time. Three of the six members of my undergraduate research team are graduating this semester. I am recognizing how privileged I am to spend time with them as they prepare for their next life chapters, and how appreciative I am of our unhurried conversations.

If my nose had been on the grindstone, I wouldn't have remembered that one of my students who graduated last year was traveling to Baylor to interview for the second time in two years for the graduate program of his dreams. I shared his disappointment (and surprise) when he didn't get in the first time—this year, I remembered to get in touch to encourage and to try to smooth jitters shortly before he walked into the interview. Some ten days later, I was treated to this former national weightlifting champion contacting me while he was sobbing in the gym, in the middle of his workout, because he just found out that he got in to Baylor.

Another part of this Renaissance has been taking a little more time to read. And there is much to read, and to read about, in this issue of *JCES*, starting with Associate Editor Drew Pearl's column on the changing nature of academic publishing. Research

articles detail new approaches to addressing timeless issues in community engagement, including negotiating power structures and ethical issues, as well as timely issues involving immigrant access to welcoming communities and effective health care. A practice-based article shares the story of success and struggle in transforming a community/university partnership into a community-based consortium. And four book reviews provide insight into in-depth studies on transformative civic engagement, storytelling, engaged research, and collective impact.

I hope that you enjoy this issue of *JCES* and this season of transformation.