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Marybeth Lima

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# JCES 13.1: Focusing on What We Can Do Rather Than What We Can't

From the Editor

Dr. Marybeth Lima is the Cliff and Nancy Spanier Alumni Professor at Louisiana State University

## Dear Engaged Reader,

When I wrote the editor's column in summer 2019, I talked about how calm and relaxed I felt. This year, I write from an entirely different place. The coronavirus pandemic and our country's long-standing and ongoing issues with racial injustice have left me unsettled and struggling to focus. I'm reminded of the Ann Pancake quote, "In times like these, you have to grow big enough inside to hold both the loss and the hope."

My experience in living through "grow big enough inside" situations has been to engage in a combination of internally driven contemplation (thinking, feeling, listening, and learning) and externally driven strategic action. For me, the "feeling" part of this process is the most difficult. I've been dismayed by the myriad structures of our society that are built on systemic, long-term inequity, even as I've been heartened by citizens who are chipping away at these structures. I've witnessed the power of people coming together around a common goal, and the devastation deliberately inflicted by others in an effort to tear us apart and crush our empathy. When I consider human nature at both ends of the civility spectrum, I sometimes feel left without words. There is definitely loss. And hope. And for me, resolve.

I've resolved to focus on what I can do rather than on what I can't, and I see this principle in action throughout my community. For example, earlier this year, volunteers who could no longer visit a senior living community to read aloud to residents simply switched to reading over the phone. I've learned that connecting to new people in the context of service is just as inspiring, even when two masks and at least six feet separate you. And I've been reminded of how important it is to act to effect change on an individual basis, and on a societal one.<sup>1</sup> As I think about the road toward justice and wellness, I am

buoyed by the stories of so many who traverse it. Some of these stories are shared in this issue of *JCES*.

The authors of two of our articles, "Determining the Efficacy of the Community Research Fellows Training: An 18-Month Evaluation" and "The Challenge of Effective Family/School Partnerships: The Middle School Parent Leadership Academy Pilot Program" focus on efficacy within their work. Dictionary.com defines efficacy as "the ability to bring about a desired or intended result." At this juncture, being intentional about our work is critically important—these two articles illustrate being intentional about research and partnership respectively.

Several articles in this issue are focused on the central role of community in engaged work. The article entitled "Nonprofit Partners' Perceptions of Organizational and Community Impact Based on a Long-Term Academic Service-Learning Partnership" reports the results of community partner interviews to evaluate the quality and impact of capstone projects in communications. In "Keeping the Promise of Community-Based Participatory Research: Integrating Applied Critical Rhetorical Methods to Amplify the Community's Voice for Trial Development," the authors describe an Applied Critical Rhetorical research approach, which, when embedded within a Community-Based Participatory Research framework, can enhance community voice and power in clinical health research. The article "Training Patient Stakeholders Builds Community Capacity, Enhances Patient Engagement in Research" details the ways in which the role of community is central to the role of university and its efforts in enhancing healthcare in the context of a Quality Enhancement Plan. The latter two articles are especially important in the midst of the current coronavirus pandemic, as the role of community in controlling its spread is paramount.

<sup>1</sup>Two references I've found particularly helpful during this time have been Alec Gallimore's piece, "Now is the Moment. So what do we do?" ([https://news.engin.umich.edu/2020/06/perspective-now-is-the-moment-so-what-do-we-do/?fbclid=IwAR2VY\\_BXySRreVNC\\_SuDY\\_TPylcx2\\_cYhvaKg6AZkMNLAX-24oiHmiXsa4PgU](https://news.engin.umich.edu/2020/06/perspective-now-is-the-moment-so-what-do-we-do/?fbclid=IwAR2VY_BXySRreVNC_SuDY_TPylcx2_cYhvaKg6AZkMNLAX-24oiHmiXsa4PgU)) and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences report (specifically by the Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship) entitled "Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century" (<https://www.amacad.org/ourcommonpurpose/report>).

Two articles in this issue focus on the importance of togetherness in engagement. In “Learning and Doing Together: Student Outcomes from an Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Research Course on Homelessness in a Local Community,” the authors highlight the togetherness inherent when integrating interdisciplinary collaboration and community-based participatory research. Also, the authors of “Telling Our Stories Together: Co-creating Written Scholarship in University and Community Partnerships,” share an approach in which community and university constituents can disseminate their written work equitably.

The art of reflection can help us make meaning of the world around us. In “Learning Anthropology by Teaching Anthropology: A Case Study of Five Service-Learning Classes at Rollins College,” Ashley Kistler discusses the ways in which her teaching practice evolved through the power of collaborative ethnography.

Collectively, the articles in this issue remind us that we can address the pandemics of coronavirus and racial inequality by proceeding thoughtfully with intentionality, community, and togetherness. In his “I Have A Dream” speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy; now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice...”

Engaged reader, the time is now.  
Make it real. Rise.