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Editor's Note

September 8, 2025

Dear Readers,

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the second issue of *Transformative Social Impact: A Journal of Community-Based Teaching & Research*. Following the enthusiastic reception of our inaugural publication, this issue continues to advance our mission of showcasing scholarship that bridges academic expertise with community needs and priorities.

The collection of articles presented in this issue exemplifies the diverse and innovative ways that higher education institutions are engaging with communities to address pressing social challenges. From comprehensive health needs assessments to interventions supporting student mental health through creative practices, our contributors demonstrate how thoughtful collaboration can generate meaningful impact.

Several compelling themes emerge across this issue. First, we see a strong focus on measurement and accountability, with multiple articles examining methods for quantifying the social and economic impact of university-community partnerships. Each provide valuable frameworks for institutions seeking to demonstrate the value of their community engagement efforts.

Cultural competence and inclusivity represent another significant theme. Deeqa Hamid and colleagues offer important insights into cross-cultural parenting practices that can inform more culturally responsive approaches in education, healthcare, and social services. Similarly, Kathleen Cienkowski and Shari Eberts demonstrate how incorporating lived experiences into professional education enhances empathy and improves service delivery.

The articles addressing financial literacy and digital equity highlight how universities can leverage their resources to create pathways to opportunity for underserved populations. These initiatives exemplify the transformative potential of academic-community partnerships to address structural inequities.

What particularly impresses me about this collection is the authors' commitment to reciprocity and mutual benefit. Rather than positioning communities as passive recipients of academic expertise, these articles demonstrate genuine partnerships where community voice and knowledge are centered in both the research process and resulting interventions.

As our journal continues to evolve, we remain dedicated to publishing work that not only advances scholarly understanding but also catalyzes positive change in communities. I invite readers to consider how the approaches described in these pages might inform their own engagement efforts and to share their experiences through future contributions to the journal.

I extend my sincere gratitude to our authors, reviewers, and editorial team for their dedication to this growing scholarly community. Your commitment to rigorous, engaged scholarship is advancing both knowledge and practice in ways that truly matter.

With appreciation for the important work ahead,

Dr. Jonathan H. Westover
Editor-in-Chief
Transformative Social Impact Journal

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Article Abstracts

A Three County Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) in Southern New Jersey: Leveraging Partnerships and Sharing Findings with Community

Authors: Devon Ziminski, Carla Villacis, Madeliene Alger, and Amanda Ekelburg, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

Abstract: *Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA)s characterize community members' views on the health needs in their communities. This research focused on a three-county CHNA region in Southern New Jersey, outlining the process, methods, findings, and dissemination plan for the CHNA. We used a mixed-methods iterative strategy of data collection and analysis that combined existing publicly available-data with primary data collected from a survey with community members, focus groups with community members, and interviews with key regional health stakeholders. The largest asset in the region is depth and breadth of partnerships between institutions. Programs and partnerships across the region are geared towards preventive care, and also aim to address the social determinants of health (e.g., vaccines, food access). Across the region, barriers underscored the rising cost of living and affordability of basic needs. Cost of healthcare, as well as healthcare access issues, also arose as the barriers most noted in the data. Data spoke to a need for generating community connections and gathering in safe, and well-resourced community spaces for learning, health care, and socialization. The prevalence of chronic illness across the region also undergirds the need for preventive and follow-up care across physical and mental health conditions. Community reported solutions and recommendations across the region focused on creating new infrastructures or shifting current infrastructure towards innovative healthcare models that work for the counties, embedding more direct services and programming directly within the community, focusing on whole-person and individualized care, advocacy for the region, and continuing and maintaining partnerships. The article also discusses our dissemination strategy and offers suggestions for how other CHNAs can employ similar methods.*

Keywords: *Community Health Needs Assessment, Community Voice, Mixed Methods, Dissemination*

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University Student Mental Health: The Impact of Creative Practice

Authors: Donna Poade and Sue Langford, Falmouth University and University of Plymouth

Abstract: *It is widely acknowledged that student mental health in higher education (HE) is at crisis point. Exacerbated by the recent pandemic and due to limiting resources at institutions, students are experiencing severe mental health with a third reporting symptoms in England in 2021 (ONS 2023). Students are at particularly high risk for the onset of mental ill health as undertaking academic endeavours is a major trigger for mental health issues such as leaving home, academic pressure, newfound autonomy, developing new friendships and managing finances (Baik 2017; Macaskill 2013). However, very few studies have examined the impact of creative-based practices aimed to support student wellbeing. This paper reports on an evaluation of a creative practice initiative aimed to support students in HE. The conceptual model demonstrated within this paper, suggests some critical success factors when implementing a creative practice initiative and some likely benefits. Using qualitative data collected from interviews and observations, the findings suggest that creative practices do have a significant benefit on student wellbeing and therefore should be considered in curriculum design to enhance student learning and development.*

Keywords: *wellbeing, higher education, creative practices, student learning and development*

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Cross-Cultural Parenting Practices: A Comparative Analysis of Western Countries and Somalia

Authors: Deeqa Hamid, Angelea Panos, Patrick T. Panos, and Paige Lowe, Utah Valley University and the University of Utah

Abstract: *This research paper examines the distinct parenting practices between the U.S., Western countries, and Somalia. The importance of this study arose with many cases of war refugee families in the community being referred to the child protection system due to their parents' discipline approaches. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, this study explores how values, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic factors shape parenting approaches in these cultures. The findings reveal significant differences in disciplinary methods, family structures, educational expectations, and child-rearing philosophies. While Western culture's parenting tends to emphasize individualism and child autonomy, Somali parenting practices prioritize collective responsibility, respect for elders, and traditional gender roles. Understanding these differences is crucial for educators, healthcare providers, child protection, and policymakers working with diverse populations.*

Keywords: *cross-cultural parenting, child-rearing practices, cultural values, Somalia*

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Integrating Lived Experiences into Audiology Education to Bridge the Empathy Gap

Authors: Kathleen Cienkowski and Shari Eberts, University of Connecticut and LivingWithHearingLoss.com

Abstract: *Community-engaged learning (CEL) offers a unique opportunity to bring the lived experience of hearing loss into the classroom, enhancing empathy and the implementation of person-centered care (PCC) among audiology students. This paper describes an initiative at the University of Connecticut that integrated CEL into an advanced hearing aids course. Students engaged with patient narratives through the book Hear & Beyond and attended a community meeting hosted by Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA). Reflections demonstrated enhanced awareness of real-world challenges and a renewed commitment to PCC. This pilot project offers a model for incorporating CEL into audiology education to improve hearing care outcomes.*

Keywords: *person-centered care, community-engaged learning, audiology education, patient narratives, experiential learning*

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The Economic and Social Impact of Service-Learning: Strengthening Community Bonds and Institutional Anchoring

Authors: Jonathan H. Westover, Western Governors University

Abstract: *This study examines the economic and social community impact of a large regional teaching university's Academic Service-Learning program through mixed-methods research combining institutional data analysis, community partner surveys (n=127), and comparative benchmarking with peer institutions. Findings reveal that the University's service-learning initiatives generated over 180,000 service hours during the 2023-2024 academic year, translating to approximately \$6 million in economic value using the Independent Sector's valuation methodology. While delivering substantial return on investment (\$192.12 in community impact per dollar invested), the program faces implementation challenges including partnership sustainability and quality consistency across courses. Analysis of student outcome data, controlling for demographic variables and prior academic performance, indicates positive associations between service-learning participation and academic persistence, though selection bias remains a limitation. Community partner interviews reveal benefits in organizational capacity and fresh perspectives, alongside concerns about project continuity and institutional power dynamics. The study positions the University's approach within anchor institution theoretical frameworks while critically examining both strengths and limitations of service-learning as a community engagement strategy. These findings contribute to understanding how higher education institutions can effectively leverage service-learning to create meaningful community impact while acknowledging the complexity of university-community partnerships.*

Keywords: *economic impact, social impact, service-learning, anchor institution, institutional anchoring, higher education, community bonds*

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Quantifying Social Return on Investment for University-Community Partnerships

Authors: Jonathan H. Westover, Western Governors University

Abstract: *This article examines methodologies and applications for quantifying social return on investment (SROI) in university-community partnerships. While traditional return on investment metrics focus on financial outcomes, SROI provides a framework for valuing the broader social, environmental, and economic benefits created through collaborative initiatives. Drawing on evidence from established frameworks and case studies, this paper presents a comprehensive approach to SROI measurement in the higher education context. The analysis explores definitional boundaries, measurement challenges, and implementation strategies across different partnership models. The findings demonstrate that quantified SROI metrics can strengthen institutional commitment, enhance partnership sustainability, inform resource allocation, and increase stakeholder engagement. Evidence-based approaches for building organizational capacity to measure and communicate social impact are presented, offering practical guidance for university administrators, community relations officers, and nonprofit partners seeking to demonstrate and enhance the value of their collaborative work.*

Keywords: *Social Return on Investment (SROI), university-community partnerships, impact measurement, social value quantification, community engagement assessment, monetization of social outcomes, stakeholder-inclusive measurement, higher education civic engagement*

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Empowering First-Generation High School Students through Financial Literacy and College Exposure at the University of Connecticut

Authors: Nora Madjar and John A. Elliott, University of Connecticut

Abstract: *The Financial Literacy and Innovation Program (FLIP) at the University of Connecticut is a unique initiative that offers students from under-resourced high schools both financial literacy and college exposure. Over six Saturdays, mentored by UConn undergraduates, high schoolers participate in interactive workshops on campus to build their confidence in navigating higher education and financial decision-making. Alumni of the program share lessons with family and return as mentors, creating a cycle of engagement with the communities served. With support from high schools, corporate partners, and alumni, the FLIP program is a great example of how universities can create engaging educational initiatives with valuable community impact.*

Keywords: *financial literacy, college exposure, mentorship, high school students, under-resourced communities, educational equity, financial decision-making, higher education access, community impact*

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Digital Equity Through Service-Learning Partnerships: Bridging Academic Learning and Community Impact

Authors: Jonathan H. Westover, Western Governors University

Abstract: *This article examines the emerging practice of utilizing service-learning partnerships to address digital equity challenges in underserved communities. Drawing on empirical research and organizational case studies, it analyzes how higher education institutions, community organizations, and private sector partners can collaboratively design interventions that simultaneously enhance student learning outcomes and address digital divides. The analysis reveals that effective partnerships leverage complementary expertise across sectors, create sustainable engagement models, and develop culturally responsive approaches to technology access, skills development, and support systems. When properly implemented, these interventions produce measurable improvements in digital inclusion while providing students with authentic professional development experiences. The article concludes with a framework for establishing, maintaining, and evaluating service-learning partnerships focused on digital equity, offering actionable insights for academic institutions and community partners seeking to develop similar initiatives.*

Keywords: *digital equity, service-learning partnerships, higher education, community organizations, private sector collaboration, digital divide, digital inclusion, digital equity interventions*

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