

Carrying the Torch Forward, Meeting the Future, and Advancing the Charge

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As the incoming editorial team, we explore the challenges and opportunities facing social equity in a complex global society and relate them to the opportunities for promoting social equity through the pages of the *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* (JSEPA). The authors discuss the importance of delivering equitable public service through knowledgeable civil discourse from a plurality of voices. The growth of JSEPA's influence relies upon its inclusive contributions to the social equity discourse. The unending pursuit and submission of excellent research that asks thoughtful, future-focused questions exemplifies the discourse found in JSEPA, where we aim to illuminate the power and necessity of the fourth pillar of public administration—social equity. This pillar takes its rightful place alongside the traditional three pillars of public administration: effectiveness, efficiency, and economy. JSEPA provides a unique space with its focus on this fourth pillar and in doing so, contributes meaningfully to public administration journals committed to the traditional pillars.

This is an exciting time to be carrying the torch forward for JSEPA. For the United States, a new political administration is taking shape in Washington, DC. Around the world, there are new governors, mayors, and legislators seeking to leave their mark on our world. To do this well, they are counting on public administrators at all levels of government and the non-profit and voluntary sectors to continue delivering the best public service we can dream and achieve. We realize more than ever that delivering the most equitable public service requires expert civil discourse, from a plurality of voices. We acknowledge the power of evidence-based decision-making moderated by well-educated, reflexive public administrators who maintain a curiosity about new ideas and who reach out for insightful equity-based scholarship. JSEPA fills this role. Further, we believe this reflexivity and curiosity enable JSEPA to contribute to transformative impact, through what MacArthur Genius winner, Ruha Benjamin calls a “viral” approach to social change, spreading a virus of good, rather than illness, that she asserts results in advocacy big and small, leading to substantive change (Benjamin 2022). This is why JSEPA is committed to framing new discourse, identifying novel opportunities, and illuminating hidden social equity breakdowns.

We are honored by this opportunity and we are humbled by the standard that has been set by our founding co-editors-in-chief. So first, we give our deepest appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Mary Guy and Dr. Brian Williams for shepherding this journal from dream to successful reality. We also reiterate our gratitude and respect for all those involved in the founding of the journal, in providing a strong financial foundation and in supporting the editorial and administrative efforts to sustain and grow JSEPA. We thank the inaugural editorial board, with special thanks to JSEPA's founders Susan Gooden, Richard Gregory Johnson III, and Sean McCandless, professors Jodi Benenson, James E. Wright II, and Tia Sherèe Gaynor, production editor Stacey Victor, editorial assistant Adam Croft, and the editorial board who all worked tirelessly to see this dream of JSEPA become a vital reality. Further, we are grateful for the ongoing support of the Democracy and Social Justice (DSJ) section of the American Society for Public Administration in sponsoring JSEPA and the University of Minnesota Libraries for their open access hosting of the journal. Finally, nothing happens without financial stability, so we extend our deep appreciation for our three inaugural funders that believed in JSEPA from its inception and, spearheaded by Laura Bloomberg, John

Bartle and Susan Gooden, provided startup funding: the University of Minnesota, the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

As the new editors, taking the reins from the inaugural editors, we have a mandate to build upon the JSEPA mission. Together, we will continue to explore and to call out the domestic and international challenges for any group facing oppression and lack of equitable opportunity, cultural validation, and economic and environmental justice. We will explore where progress has occurred and where progress has been lost. Economic justice for all is necessary if we are to create a more sustainable future for all. As the specter of climate change haunts public administration across the full breadth and scope of its services, we must reevaluate how we frame equity for emerging economies. True inclusivity for all must include individuals of all demographics and identities, including those living with (dis)abilities and those compounded intersectionalities that go beyond surface-level understandings of how people present themselves. We must create opportunities for building understanding that captures a willingness to engage deeply and to support difficult conversations, bringing together oppressor and oppressed for reconciliation-focused research and practice. Through it all, we acknowledge that people of all orientations are representative of a vibrant diversity of cultural heritage, coming together to create a more equitable and just world. This is our journal's sweet spot; considering how public policy, public administration, the laws that are passed, how justice systems reflect equity (or not), and how public institutions support or break down progress in achieving greater social equity These are the pressure points of society that are reflected in JSEPA's pages.

Reducing disparities through social equity advocacy has never been more essential. In thinking about how JSEPA is guiding future-forward thinking, we consider the many challenges that contribute to domestic and global inequities such as political and cultural conflict and war, environmental crisis, public health concerns, discrimination due to gender identity, sexual orientation, citizenship status, (dis)ability, religion, economic opportunity, and educational gaps, to name just a few facing our world. Since 2023 in the United States alone, 86 bills have been proposed in 28 states, seeking to restrict or ban diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in public institutions (Chronicle of Higher Education 2024). Afghanistan has banned education for women beyond

elementary school years, and now, in addition to being physically invisible in society, they are prohibited from being heard in public (Noack 2024). UN Women is raising the rallying cry about increasing global gender gaps (Bergsten and Lee 2023). Indeed, we are seeing a confluence of challenges that reverse or hinder progress on our journey toward a more equitable world (Reidpath et al. 2023). Now, more than ever, we turn to JSEPA to push back on this dampening of progress by upholding and expanding our understanding of, and knowledge about, social justice, equity, and diversity.

The Opportunities

The scholarship presented in JSEPA is broad, calling out “isms” like racism, ethnocentrism, colonialism, classism, and phobias such as homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia or misogyny and bigotry; and a wide range of injustice and systems embedded to varying degrees within public administration at all levels and in all parts of the world. JSEPA provides an opportunity to consider what works, what fails, and what opportunities are available to advance justice, reduce disparities, and eradicate the fears that our ability to “other” has created.

We recognize that in our global society, expectations for and definitions of social equity differ across countries and cultures, but exist in every community and every nation. Further, it is crucial to remember that “social equity doesn't need to be viewed as a zero-sum game with improvements for one meaning diminishment for others” (Evans and Knepper 2023, 16). This is why the contributions of JSEPA are critical—to bravely query and question the obvious oppressive hegemonic practices, as well as to thoughtfully analyze the more insidious and invisible discriminatory and “othering” of individuals and groups. JSEPA provides an equitable and accessible opportunity to confront inequity in the sphere of public administration, service, and policy, to reveal and recommend resolutions for the dark underbelly of discrimination and oppression.

JSEPA is structured to serve a broad audience—students, scholars, public service professionals, and anyone seeking insights into social equity. JSEPA is also published for a global audience, with a two-fold mission to both illuminate inequities, call out problems and raise solutions, and to maintain an accessible and open learning space. JSEPA welcomes scholarship that reflects a rich diversity of social equity issues, wherever they arise

and in whatever form. We may agree to disagree. That is the nature of discourse. No real social change has ever been earned without reflection and debate. This too is why JSEPA is unique.

As your new editors, we are excited to publish the most insightful and interesting research and theoretical articles that are asking the big social equity questions facing our global society. But we also want to highlight some of the more unexpected materials we call for on our website and promote in the journal. JSEPA continues its first-in-the-nation position to promote a distinct *Racial Healing* track in the journal. Articles in this section explore racial healing, race, and racism, and accompanying intersectional impacts as they pertain to strategies, processes, and practices in public management and public policy. *Promoting Social Justice* is the track that promotes action, moving from research to implementation. Here, authors reflect on the obstacles and opportunities of operationalizing social equity and social justice, from current trends to tomorrow's solutions through the use of innovative formats to advance dialogue. JSEPA was founded on a deep commitment to affecting practice. Consequently, the journal's *Theory to Practice* section encourages scholar-practitioner pairings and discourse that debates and enlightens through the voicing of different perspectives on the same issues, including innovative formats such as point-counterpoint debates, case studies, notes from the field, conceptual papers, commentaries, or traditional empirical and theoretical papers. Part of the commitment of JSEPA is to serve as an integrated resource for social equity, beyond traditional scholarship. As noted on our website, alongside traditional book reviews, JSEPA invites thoughtful considerations of "those other publications" (TOPS), such as government documents and popular culture artifacts like social media, movies, music, toys, course syllabi, and more.

Our Editorial Vision

In only three years, JSEPA is already cemented among public administration journals as the first choice publishing outlet for social equity and social justice scholarship. Our vision is to grow JSEPA's reach to more scholars, practitioners, community members, and media outlets to broaden access to our cutting-edge social equity scholarship and thought leadership. We will continue to grow JSEPA's mission to being the globally

recognized leading resource for social equity discourse within the frame of public administration. Publishing two open access issues per year, JSEPA delivers trailblazing theory, research, and commentary on social equity matters of access, process, quality, and outcomes of administrative actions, policy decisions, and administrative law. It is also a voice for reconciliation, restoration, and remediation strategies.

As your new co-editors-in-chief, we aim to reinforce and build upon this successful global social equity work by nurturing insightful and rigorous new scholarship. To achieve this, we approach our vision from an integrative and democratic foundation with the JSEPA editorial board and through expanded access, visibility, and use of JSEPA's scholarship. JSEPA's theory to practice commitment is particularly meaningful for us. Not only because of our own scholarship, but also because our prior practitioner backgrounds were spent serving vulnerable populations. Together we bring 40 years of practitioner experience, working with populations or missions including intellectual disabilities, AIDS, mental health, environmental, child welfare, domestic violence, and early childhood education for low-income families. As former practitioners, we bring this strong focus on social equity to all aspects of our work, including a commitment to mentoring and collaboration in scholarship and service. We hope to build upon two-way mentoring, with senior scholars, practitioners, students, and junior scholars of diverse intersectional attributes learning from each other and creating dynamic scholarly synergy. We feel this fresh approach to both equity in management and in developing intersectional scholarship presents a new path to generating more democratic and just insights into our process of writing about public administration. We will bring this integrative and intersectional commitment to bridging theory to practice to our JSEPA leadership with an eye to helping prepare and boost individuals desiring to move into future editorial roles and to build pipelines for future editors.

We aim to sustain the key relationship-building and journal visibility with a robust audience of academics, students, and practitioners. By leveraging our associate editors, we hope to increase "foot traffic" to JSEPA that results in alternative metrics, such as reads, downloads, and shares, in addition to traditional citations. We will engage social media to enable alternative and accessible methods of highlighting the articles appearing in the

journal along with special events engagements. We will develop opportunities to carry on the spirit of the previous JSEPA workshops, partnering with the Social Equity Leadership Conference, ASPA sections, and other conferences where appropriate.

As we begin this new endeavor, we'd like to formally introduce ourselves, JSEPA's new editorial leadership team, and your resource for social equity scholarly resources:

- Dr. Hillary J. Knepper (Pace University) and Dr. Michelle D. Evans (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga) will serve as co-editors-in-chief.
- Dr. Jodi Benenson (University of Nebraska Omaha) will move into a Senior Associate Editor role assisting with journal administration and continuing to lead our innovative *Reviews* section.
- Dr. Schnequa N. Diggs (North Carolina Central University) will join us as Associate Editor overseeing *Pop Culture*.
- Dr. Tony Carrizales (Marist College) will join us as Associate Editor to lead our *Topical* area with a focus on equity, technology, and pedagogy.
- Phin Xaypangna (Phin Consulting) brings a practitioner, finance, and local government DEI perspective and will serve as the Associate Editor of *Practice*.
- Dr. Vernise Estorcien (Indiana University Indianapolis) will join us as Associate Editor for *Social Media*, leading our outreach efforts to increase our international exposure.

This editorial leadership team represents a variety of intersectional identities, including a range of senior and junior scholars, academics and practitioners, U.S. and international representation, as well as interdisciplinary subfields that overlap with JSEPA's mission and vision focus. We will also be recruiting additional members of the editorial team to help represent and expand our mission internationally, topically, and to promote a wide range of voices, identities, and experiences.

Our Commitment

We understand the dynamic nature of social equity exists within a complex global environment of extreme differences, divergent cultural values, and inequitable access to education and opportunity. By remaining true to our roots of open discourse, JSEPA's commitment to continuing as a no-fee open access journal means this discourse is available to anyone with access to the in-

ternet. We believe this lights up the darkest corners of our shared world by illuminating how our differences make us innovative, resilient, and better, and how we can all contribute to creating a more equitable world through reflexive scholarship and practice. To this end, we attribute the success of JSEPA to four critical factors we commit to upholding:

- The submission of excellent research asking thoughtful, future-focused questions
- Recognition (and citing) of the high-quality and wide-ranging equity-focused research found in JSEPA
- A dedicated editorial board that nurtures and mentors this excellent research
- Past and present editors and supporting staff who firmly hold to our mission and aims

Our commitment as co-editors-in-chief is also to continue to illuminate the power of the fourth pillar of public administration, social equity, to transform our world. As this pillar has assumed its rightful position alongside the traditional pillars of public administration, effectiveness, efficiency, and economy, so JSEPA has created a journal unique in its focus on our fourth pillar. In doing so, JSEPA makes a vibrant, and meaningful contribution to those public administration journals dedicated to the traditional pillars of our field. As our outgoing inaugural editors, Dr. Mary Guy and Dr. Brian Williams note, "the *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* is a living thing. It has a short past, a vibrant present, and a glorious future" (Guy and Williams, 2025, 1). Our promise to you is to take your innovative social equity scholarly contributions and collaboratively build this impactful future and engaged community that makes use of the full array of resources compiled by the journal. We are also more than happy to hear from you about your ideas as we move forward. Together, let us help manifest what Ruha Benjamin challenges us to do. By capitalizing on the breadth and reach of JSEPA, together we can spread a positive virus of social equity around the globe and in our own institutions.

Lastly, we must once again share our gratitude for the knowledge, experience, and support of the founders, funders, editors emeritus, DSJ section, and all those who have volunteered on the inaugural editorial board and editorial team, the authors and reviewers, and the countless other individuals who are so instru-

mental in sustaining a journal. Rest assured that we will be endeavoring to keep them involved in JSEPA moving forward. We view this as a team effort, one which is best served by putting theory into practice, and engaging the broadest possible range of voices and perspectives going forward. We are excited to see where this journey leads us and to learn and grow from the stimulating scholars and research that we will be nurturing, highlighting, and expanding the reach of, over the next three years.

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