

Advancing JSEPA's Social Equity Charge

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The *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* (JSEPA) reiterates our mission, aims, and scope to support original research and discussions aimed at illuminating inequities, advancing justice, and reducing disparity within the public service sphere. The co-editors-in-chief briefly discuss the current environment for JSEPA, some new opportunities for scholarship, introduce new members of the JSEPA family, and highlight recently departed and sorely missed colleagues.

Revisiting a Changing Environment

How quickly times change. When we started drafting our incoming editor's message back in October, we were focused on the exciting times we saw ahead for advancing social equity and public administration scholarship and practice. We wrote about “. . . 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” (Knepper and Evans 2025, 4). Our first piece was an effort to introduce ourselves and our vision for this next phase of the *Journal of Social Equity in Public Administration* (JSEPA). We were excited to take the helm of expanding JSEPA's reputation and to build a future-focused discourse of an expanding worldview of social equity in public administration.

As it turns out, the inception of JSEPA three years ago could not have been timelier or more essential. Sponsored by the Section on Democracy and Social Justice (DSJ) of the American Society for Public Administration, it was brought to life by the support of a host of dedicated scholars, practitioners, funders, and institutions (see Guy and Williams 2025; Knepper and Evans 2025). JSEPA established a dedicated home for research on critical social equity debates in the public sphere. Staying true to our core mission and “walking the talk,” JSEPA is a peer-reviewed, no-fee, open-access journal, committed to raising critical scholarly voices that reach the broadest audience possible. The aim of JSEPA is

also to bridge research-to-practice divides that can stifle progress in overcoming social and structural inequities.

Fast forward to March 2025. It appears that everything JSEPA stands for is increasingly under fire: diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives have been ordered terminated under Executive Order 13985.

The Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), assisted by the Attorney General and the Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), shall coordinate the termination of all discriminatory programs, including illegal DEI and “diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility” (DEIA) mandates, policies, programs, preferences, and activities in the Federal Government, under whatever name they appear (The White House, 2025a, Sec 6(b), p. 7011).

Perhaps most relevant to JSEPA scholars and readers, there has been a massive rollback of, and attack on, these initiatives beginning with the scrubbing of equity-related terms from federal webpages (Yourish, Daniel, Datar, White, and Gami 2025), flagged or banned within federal grant reviews (McFarling, Chen and Oweremohle 2025), and most recently prohibitions on policies aimed at eliminating discrimination, structural inequities, or disparate impacts (The White House 2025b). These actions aim not just to shift governmental policies, but to intimidate, silence, and sometimes punish those who have advocated for or implemented these policies, as well

as to stifle research that focuses on these issues in even peripheral ways. This was just the beginning.

Federal agencies are being shuttered (Bender, Kanno-Youngs, and Montague 2025) and essential funding halted to federal grantees and contractors (Pearson and Damon 2025). Legal U.S. residents are being removed from the United States without due process of law for exercising their right to assembly (Pazmino and Alvarado, 2025). Media companies are silencing opinions critical of the current political administration in Washington, DC (Mullin 2025). The very foundation of democracy in the United States is being shaken (Katz and Urby 2025) and the power of an independent media to call out these actions is under threat (Langfitt 2025).

Riding a wave of populism that propelled his administration back into office, President Donald Trump and the creation of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) have thrown out the traditional public administration playbook. Gone is the historical stability of public goods and services, federal funding for both domestic and international grantees is no longer stable, and the deep disengagement from justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion at multiple levels and across sectors has risen to an alarming level. These behaviors by the U.S. executive branch are being met with governors and world leaders standing their ground (Greenblatt 2025), while nonprofit and for-profit institutions struggle to resist crippling financial threats (Broadwater 2025). Grave concerns have arisen about the validity, legality, and constitutionality of the actions of this administration and about the loss of professional, educated civil servants, as demonstrated by increasing numbers of lawsuits and judicial rulings against recent Trump administration policies and executive orders (Knutson 2025). The impact of these challenges on American democratic governance is being widely felt, but none more so than marginalized people and communities. These types of actions are not isolated to the United States, they are increasingly emerging across the globe (Tharoor 2025).

This deeply political attack on the work of the federal government engages with a long-standing public administration debate. This “politics-administration dichotomy” is considered as the severing, or not, of politics that create laws and policies from their implementation and administration (Callahan and Mau 2024; McCandless and Guy 2013; Georgiou 2014; Svava 1998). These debates have largely focused on whether it is possible or desirable to try to separate politics from

administration, within research, or within the training and preparation of public servants. Recently, the traditional debates over the politics-administration dichotomy seem almost quaint and simplistic in light of the current dramatic shifts in approaches to bureaucracy and public administration.

Perhaps the blurring of this old debate is the new normal for public service in the United States and consequently, the relevance of the social equity mission of JSEPA—to illuminate inequities and to provide a learning space—has never been more important. Brave voices that continue to push back against these approaching threats are encouraged to speak their truths. It is essential that those who can, will, while representing the voices of those who can’t speak up.

At the recent joint annual meeting of the DSJ section and the JSEPA editorial board, a question was raised about whether JSEPA would be open to publishing submissions with authorship credited as “Anonymous.” As co-editors-in-chief, we can state that we are currently exploring the feasibility of this question. Any authors who are concerned about going on record with essays or research should reach out to us to discuss the situation. But take a moment and ponder what this question implies for the state of our field and profession, the implied [in]stability of this moment in time, and the level of stress and fear that it implies for institutions, traditions, values, and for the safety or security of students, scholars, and public servants.

New Fast-Track Publishing Opportunity

In response to these fast moving, turbulent times, JSEPA has created a “fast-track” opportunity within our existing Promoting Social Justice and Racial Healing sections for shorter submissions (@3,500 words) with faster peer-reviewed turnaround times, to allow scholars and practitioners an outlet for essays and commentaries addressing current issues applicable to social equity/public administration research (see JSEPA website, “Submissions,” for full details). This opportunity is available on a rolling basis through at least the January 2026 JSEPA issue. The first of these new, shorter style submissions is included in this issue. As always, we are eternally grateful to all of our dedicated reviewers over the last few years, but we have to give special thanks to the reviewers of these fast-track pieces who amazingly turned around reviews in less than 10 days and helped the authors get across the finish line in time for this issue.

JSEPA News

We have some good news in our efforts to push forward with our mission. JSEPA is delighted to announce new additions to our team. Stephanie Dolamore has joined the JSEPA editorial team as the Associate Editor for Disability Inclusion. Stephanie is a current practitioner advocate for disability issues in the Maryland/Washington, DC area, as well as a former professor at Gallaudet University. We also have four new members joining our esteemed colleagues on the JSEPA editorial board—Mohamad Alkadry from University of Connecticut, Karen Johnston from University of Portsmouth, Edgar Ramirez de la Cruz from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and Pooja Paswan from Jamia Millia Islamia, India. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to them for joining us in our endeavors and we expect to continue adding scholars and practitioners from across the globe to our team in the future.

While we delight in welcoming our new editorial board members, we also want to take a moment to acknowledge the recent loss of two public administration luminaries who devoted their lives to public administration and social equity:

Dr. Laila El Baradei was a Professor and former Acting Dean at the American University in Cairo School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. She was the lead author, along with Mohamed Kadry and Ghadeer Ahmed, for “Social Media Advocacy for SDG 5 in the Middle East: Insights from Egypt, Tunisia, and Jordan” that appeared in JSEPA volume 3, issue 1. This article was recognized with the Best Paper Award from the ASPA International chapter at the 2025 ASPA Annual Conference.

Dr. Blue Wooldridge was an esteemed senior scholar in our field, recognized as the Distinguished Career Professor and Professor Emeritus at Virginia Commonwealth University. He was a staunch advocate for social equity, leadership and ethical governance, and had a long and successful track record of personal scholarship, teaching, and mentoring within the public administration field.

The impact of their dedication to social equity and public administration is unparalleled and will reverberate for decades to come. As co-editors-in-chief of

JSEPA, alongside our editorial board, we will continue to build upon the work of these giants as we expand the scope and reach of our scholars.

JSEPA Volume 3, Issue 2

As mentioned, the first of the new “Fast Track” submissions will appear in this issue. In our *Promoting Social Justice* section, we present the essay “Threats to Democracy: A Danger to Social Justice For All,” which is authored by many of the leaders of the ASPA Democracy and Social Justice section (Irizarry et al. 2025). In the *Racial Healing* section, Ashley E. Nickels and Camille Tinnin (2025) present their essay on “Radical Hope as a Transformative Praxis in the Face of Hate and Intolerance.”

JSEPA volume 3, issue 2 also features original research by a host of talented scholars. The first article, “Intersectional Representation Among Employees in U.S. School Districts,” by Melissa A. Taylor, Larra Rucker, Valerie H. Hunt, and Brinck Kerr (2025) uses U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) data as a tool to conduct a social equity audit of public schools and the over/under demographic representation in teachers and administrators. Vernice Estorcion and Andrea Headley (2025) examine perceptions and experiences of marginalized youth and mentors in their article “Police-Youth Programs as Citizen-State Interactions: A Case Study of Police and Underrepresented Youth Perceptions.” The next article, “Gauging the Gap: Inequality of Time Use When Seeking Government Services,” by Andrea Briceno-Mosquera and Sharon Mastracci (2025) uses the American Time Use Survey to examine time as an element of administrative burdens. Sara Rinfret and Eric Wise (2025) contribute a qualitative examination of gender dynamics perceptions in frontline public servants. The final research article is presented by Josephine K. Hazelton-Boyle (2025) and focuses on “Intersectionality in Practice: How Public Transit Agencies Understand and Apply Intersectionality in the Pursuit of Gender Equity.”

This issue also includes reviews of two new books. Adam Butz and Christopher Tyler Burks (2025) provide insights on *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermine Black Homeownership* by Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor. The issue closes out with a review of the new book entitled *Managing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Public Service Organizations: A*

Liberatory Justice Approach by Rashmi Chordiya and Meghna Sabharwal (Zeraatpisheh & Aggarwal, 2025).

JSEPA Statement

In closing, as co-editors-in-chief, we would like to reiterate that JSEPA stands firm in our desire to continue in our core mission to “illuminate inequities” by spotlighting scholarship on critical “issues pertaining to social equity in the pursuit of public purposes” to “advance justice and reduce disparity . . . take account of successes and failures . . . causes and impacts, and strategies to correct” and to “provide a learning space” for our global audience (JSEPA n.d.). The saying, “united we stand, divided we fall” is used to symbolize unity and strength within U.S. history (UnitedWeStand.com n.d.). The saying also embodies that necessity for common purpose, particularly in the advancement of social change, defending our values, and recognizing that attacks on one are attacks on all. Mary E. Guy, JSEPA editor emeritus, recently wrote that public administration must “harness collective action in a way that is inclusive and pursues the greater good for everyone” as part of the core values and foundations of (small d) democratic institutions and processes (Guy 2025, 1).

We are all facing a new normal, as academics and practitioners, as faculty and students, as individuals born and raised in this country or anywhere in the world, and most importantly, as human beings. We face the necessity of trying to navigate new paths forward in an environment of changing legal, administrative, and social dynamics. We call upon you, our readers, our contributors, our reviewers, our editorial board members, to help all of us to rise up and stand tall as we continue our scholarship, teaching, and practice efforts to restore and grow social equity and justice in public administration.

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