

# Editor's Introduction: Resilient Neighborhoods Around Us Calling for Community Democracy

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## Introduction

The weight of the world seems to be crashing on many of us in higher education. With changing federal guidelines, constrained funding streams, fluctuating executive leadership, conservative budget approaches, changing demographics and enrollment patterns, limits on hiring and resources allocation, challenges to academic freedom, and a barrage of new information arriving daily, the higher education context is experiencing change at an unparalleled rate. Yet, the context of change has even more fundamental implications for members of our communities. Increased food insecurity due to high market prices and less assistance programs offer a stark example. Many non-profit organizations are fielding increased demand from clients with the tensions of limited funding streams, reduced budgets, staffing changes, reorganization strategies, and fewer federal or state support structures. Basic food and health supplies coupled with physical security are the fundamental needs for many members in our communities, given our current context.

In my own urban setting of Chicago, a city in which I have spent the majority of my professional life in social services and higher education, I observe the challenges daily. The image I cannot unsee is that of masked federal agents in uniform physically grabbing people who have been racially and ethnically profiled, based on the assumption of their documentation status. As traumatic as those images may have been on the news or streaming on social media, no words can express the reality and experience of community members. People are no longer moving about the community in the same way, as going to the grocery store, going to church, synagogue, temple, or mosque, or going to visit friends and family are dangerous. People are afraid to leave their homes; young children and young adults were frightened because if they go to school, upon their return home, their loved ones (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and neighbors) may no longer be at home due to being detained. Colleagues are worried about their own children,

partners, parents, and siblings; one colleague shares the only way she can come to work is by pretending none of this is happening. The basic rights of individuals are not only demeaned, but rejected; the risks to physical safety of so many individuals beg the question: where are the democratic processes and human rights that founded the communities in which we live gone?

Yet, through this traumatic reality, I have also witnessed community members (whose visual assumed identities deem them not dangerous or “illegal”) escort those very people at risk of being detained across the community. Horns honking and whistles blowing to alert community members about the presence of federal agents combine with social media apps that alert community members as well. Peaceful protests abound on street corners in neighborhoods and on busy highways to demonstrate support for those individuals targeted, and to reject authoritarian tactics of brutality and dehumanization. In light of this urban context in which the civil rights and physical safety of so many are under attack, the community response is a grass-roots effort to support targeted community members, allow them to make choices related to their safety and loved ones as they move about the community, and recognize their dignity and humanity. Although the sadness, anger, and grief, combined with shock acknowledging the incomprehensible reality in our beloved city, weighs on me daily, observing my fellow community members’ responses provides me with a faith in and hope for the promise of community democracy.

I often lean on Richard Guarasci’s *Neighborhood Democracy: Building Anchor Partnerships Between Colleges and Their Communities* (2022) given its emphasis on democratic partnerships in our communities through the anchor framework. Guarasci invites us into this idea of community democracy. He identifies the challenge to democracy that we are facing currently in the United States:

Democracies are in peril throughout the world and no more so than in the United States. The rise of right-wing populism has resurrected the deep strain in American politics founded upon nativism, ethno-centrism, anti-intellectualism, and, most deeply, naked racism and White supremacy. (p. 1)

Guarasci’s approach explores the issues claiming our cities, such as intergenerational poverty, income gaps, racial segregation, and wealth gaps. He also recognizes the flawed business model of higher education articulating the financial crisis this model causes for institutions of higher learning. In addition, Guarasci clarifies the role that American colleges and universities have played in preparing democratic citizens for important roles in the community. As a matter of fact, Guarasci reminds us that the preparation for democratic citizenry is core to the mission and connects it to the historical evolution of higher education. With support of professional organizations like the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) who fostered institutions of higher education as stewards of place and anchor institutions in their local communities, the civic engagement movement was shaped in distinct ways. Guarasci ultimately

makes the case for anchor partnerships between the community and colleges and universities as a civic imperative:

Nationally, these partnerships hold significant promise in addressing unremitting inequality and the enduring racial barriers. . . . Morally, the civic imperative is ubiquitous. Society needs universities and colleges to become allies in addressing inequality as part of their historic civic mission. (p. 75)

Guarasci offers numerous case study examples throughout his text, followed by professional organizations like CUMU who support this civic mission. In the end, Guarasci argues for neighborhood democracy and engaged universities as he states: “To recapture its founding mission, higher education must play a founding role in the restoration of American democracy” (p. 154). The emphasis on community democracy – on the very neighborhoods that make our communities the source of democracy – is clearly necessary now more than ever, given our neighborhoods are under attack.

In this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* journal, the core concepts of community democracy are explored through the scholarly interrogation and research of a variety of scholar-practitioners. In the research articles of this issue, community partnerships, community engagement, and student engagement in K-12 settings are explored more deeply in the context of place-based approaches. Reed’s research article, *During and Post-COVID-19 Community Engagement Expectations and Attitudes Among College Students*, suggests we need to reimagine their current service-learning curricula and programming to meet the needs of the evolving college student, with respect to the changes experienced by the global pandemic. Barringer’s work *The Intersection of Knowledge and Engagement: Patterns in Community Partners’ Experiences with a Place-Based Community Engagement Program* centers community partners in order to elevate their insights and experiences in place-based community engagement, offering a framework for partnership. Aggarwal’s *Enhancing Student Engagement Through Learning Science Principles: A Research-Based Approach Using a Classroom Management Tracking Tool and Video Analysis* offers an analysis of tools for classroom management and student engagement, highlighting translational research frameworks, which has practical implications for teacher preparation in P-12 educational settings.

In the journal’s praxis articles, the concept of community democracy is further explored and explicated. Everson, et al.’s scholarly article, *Building Bridges, Not Walls: Mobilizing Community Engagement to Promote Democracy, Diversity, and Equity*, offers a model of community-engaged learning through the lens of service sociology to address social inequalities. Clifford et al.’s work, *The Baltimore Immigration Summit: A Case Study of Academic-Community Collaboration*, shares a case study of the Baltimore Immigration Summit (BIS) utilizing public sociology as the inquiry lens into a model for partnership between universities and local governments, further exploring community democracy. Conti et al.’s article, *Are There Any Histories That Are Off Limits?: Performing History and Autobiography in Progress with*

*Incarcerated Students, Returning Citizens, Police Officers, and More*, share a community-engaged course program that offers creative ways to bring teaching, research, and social activism into the classroom building from the curriculum of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. Taylor's *Academic and Nonprofit Partnerships Can Enhance Capacity-Building* explores partnership development from the perspective of faculty members in higher education in order to contribute meaningfully to capacity-building efforts in partnership with nonprofits and other community-based organizations.

In the end, the scholarly articles in this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* journal push the dialogue to enrich relationships between campuses and communities, specifically considering the lens of anchor partnerships and community democracy. The call for higher education institutions to lead the effort alongside community partnerships is clear. Not only will our communities be strengthened through such partnerships, but our democracy depends on it.

## References

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