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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

“Our nation finds itself in a befuddling juxtaposition of realities. We have the highest access to voting rights in our history, yet we struggle to muster half of eligible voters to exercise their rights. Despite a public that remains largely disengaged with electoral politics, Gallup’s poll on civic health reveals that Americans contribute more time and money to those in need than citizens of any other nation.” (A Crucible Moment, 2012, 7-8)

What makes a community civically healthy? What inspires or hinders a community’s civic action?

In preparation for this volume, the VA Engage Journal has challenged itself as a forum for reflection and dialogue on civic engagement with the addition of a special Call For Papers on civic action and civic health. By many conventional measures, we find ourselves undergoing what the authors of A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future call a “civic erosion” (6). At the same time, new conditions for mobilizing knowledge are fostering new forms of civic action and activism. With this dedicated focus in our fifth volume, we hoped to challenge our authors to consider the civic changes taking place in American society and to inspire our readers to reflect on their experience of this change.

In the first paper, Moustafa Nassar reflects on his personal experience in service learning as a student at Averett University. He explores the role of engagement as a tool in the process of forming one’s identity in a direct response to our Call For Papers. Next, Nabeel Janjua, Yan Li, and Manoj Thomas pursue a global perspective by sharing personal research on technology education in Haiti while discussing the opportunities and challenges in the use of IT as a platform for development.

In “A Love Untaught by Law,” Emma Oliver, now a graduate of Christopher Newport University, analyzes the language and beliefs of Laramie, Wyoming residents as represented in *The Laramie Project*, a play by the Tectonic Theater Company about the Matthew Shephard hate crime. Finally, Anna Paden Carson, a returning author to the *VA Engage Journal*, examines the treatment of undocumented persons within the U.S. Immigration Court System and Detention System from a legal and ethical perspective.

While each paper selected for publication explores a unique subject within the realm of community activism and engagement, we have found the same overarching theme emerging throughout: the idea of challenging limits. Through this collection of papers, readers will see the limits of traditional learning and the limits of technology, the limits of the law and the limits of language. Yet, readers will also realize the enormous potential to be found when we seek to overcome the boundaries of current practice. As our authors demonstrate, to challenge the material, experiential, legal, and even personal limitations we experience in our schools, governments, workplaces, and communities offers the opportunity for growth, both personal and collective.

It is our hope that this fifth edition of the *VA Engage Journal* will promote conversation on the limits in our society and the simultaneous potential for progress, but what is more will motivate reflection regarding what our individual roles in overcoming these limitations might be.

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