

Editor's Introduction: Exploring Civic Innovations with Higher Education in Prison Programs and Approaches

Patrick M. Green¹

¹ Executive Director, CELTS, Director of Engaged Learning, Clinical Assistant Professor, School of Education, Loyola University Chicago

Cite as: Green, P.M. (2025). Editor's Introduction: Exploring Civic Innovations with Higher Education in Prison Programs and Approaches. *Metropolitan Universities*, 35(4), 1-2. DOI: 10.18060/28836

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Guest Editors: Darren Wheelock, Ph.D., Theresa Tobin, Ph.D., and Robert S. Smith, Ph.D.

Editor: Patrick M. Green, Ed.D.

The role of higher education has been questioned from a variety of perspectives over the past several decades, interrogating the return on the investment given increased tuition prices, to the funding models at state and federal levels to its purposes, achievements, and deliverables. As a student of history, it is important to recognize the historical context and the foundational elements of the civic purpose of higher education. It is impossible to separate institutions of higher education from the local communities in which they reside and their civic purposes to educate citizens and members of the community. Whether approaching this from the lens of social and economic mobility or the common good, higher education as a public good is rooted in its history.

Metropolitan Universities journal (MUJ), as a peer-reviewed journal, is dedicated to that very core of higher education, exploring evidence-based scholarship, research, praxis, and theoretical perspectives relevant to urban and metropolitan universities, with a focus in this special issue on higher education in prison and reentry programs. For decades, institutions of higher education have been exploring pathways to support individuals impacted by the justice system, and the proliferation of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program across many campuses has supported this endeavor (see <https://www.insideoutcenter.org/>). The long-standing, definitive stance rooted in research that higher education has the potential to be transformative, coupled with the civic mission and place-based, anchor institution approach of higher education's commitment to the local community, extends to this topic through the lens of social transformation through higher education. On behalf of the editorial board of MUJ, we found this topic to be of the utmost importance as those marginalized in our society are invited into the promise of social transformation, and thus we are pleased to interrogate this topic in this special issue together.

The guest editors, Drs. Darren Wheelock, Theresa Tobin, and Robert Smith of Marquette University (Milwaukee, WI) have curated articles exploring higher education in prison and reentry programs in rich detail. The guest editors begin with the framing piece, *Reimagining the Potential of Higher Education in Prison and Reentry*, a challenge for us to rethink the potential of higher education in prison programs, situating the reality of statistics in their local communities while offering promising practices through Marquette’s Center for Research, Training, and Outreach (CURTO). Their inquiry explores fundamental questions, such as “why higher education?” and “how has history and policy led us to our current context?” while they interrogate the impacts of incarceration on all members of the community. They end their framing piece with the transformational paradigm – indeed an invitation to reimagine the potential of social transformation which higher education living its civic mission may provide. In the end, our guest editors have set forth a challenge for us to engage more deeply with higher education in prison programs and reentry approaches, inviting us to reimagine the civic purposes of higher education throughout this special issue.