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Editor's Note

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A Note from the Editor

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“Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. . . .” The speaker [Mr. Grandgrind], and the schoolmaster [Mr. M’Choakumchild], and the third grown person present [Mr. Bounderby], all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels, then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.

Thus begins Charles Dickens’s 1854 novel *Hard Times*. For those who have read it, you will remember that, by the end of the novel, Dickens has exposed and indicted a Victorian education system that turns out teachers and students who act as unfeeling automatons. The novel demonstrates not only that children learn most effectively when they are encouraged to imagine, engage, and reflect but also that hindering creative, active, introspective learning can be detrimental to society.

In the spirit of *Hard Times*, this issue of *Experiential Learning & Teaching in Higher Education* presents examples of several successful experiential learning programs that encourage, to varying degrees, imaginative, engaged, reflective learning. The communities in which these programs operate benefit greatly from the university students’ efforts, and, as with any well-conducted experiential learning program, the students see clear benefits to themselves, as learners, as well. The four articles in this issue describe the experiences of their authors at Nazareth College, Michigan State University, SUNY Oswego, and Southern New Hampshire University, experiences that can serve as models for building innovative programs and establishing effective practices at our own institutions.

The first article, “Operationalizing the Roles of Experiential Learning: Bringing the Partnership to Life,” describes and analyzes a collaborative program benefiting Nazareth College students and the Discovery Charter School students with whom the Nazareth students work. As the article

demonstrates, clearly defining the responsibilities of key members of Nazareth's Partners for Learning program was critical to the program's success.

With the focus of its study on the use of ePortfolios in Michigan State's Bailey Scholars Program—an integrative, self-directed, engaged community of learners—"Integrating High Impact Practices: Recognizing Attributes and Overcoming Obstacles in Learning ePortfolios" provides guidance for those considering incorporating ePortfolios into their curriculum. Implementing ePortfolios presents challenges, but if the technology is understood, explained, and utilized following best practices, it can be an effective means to document and demonstrate student learning.

"A University and Middle School Mentor-Scholar Partnership" presents the results of a five-year study of an innovative program between SUNY Oswego and the Oswego School District. The article outlines the program's pedagogical philosophy and demonstrates the impact of the program on both the university student mentors and the "at-risk" middle school student mentees.

The final article in this issue, "Project IICE: Inspiring Interdisciplinary Collaboration Experiences," outlines a unique cross-disciplinary learning experience requiring the coordination of efforts and resources from academic departments and campus facilities staff and administrators. As feedback from those working on the SNHU Arboretum Project indicated, clear communication among everyone involved in projects of this type, from planning through completion, is critical to achieving desired outcomes.

Finally, on the cover of this issue of ELTHE is an image of a controlled burn carried out by students in a wildlife habitat course at the University of Tennessee at Martin. As readers are aware, historically devastating wildfires displaced and killed many people around the world in 2017, from the U.S., Canada, and Chile to Portugal, Spain, and Australia. Creating opportunities for students, like those at UT-Martin, to learn firsthand about the positive effects they can have on the environment is as important now as it has ever been.

As we work at our respective institutions to create and promote innovative experiential learning opportunities, I would ask that we keep in mind the message of *Hard Times* and of the essays in this issue of *Experiential Learning & Teaching in Higher Education*: it is our responsibility to inspire students to exercise their imaginations, enable them to engage actively in their communities, and encourage them to reflect upon the effects of their actions.