EDITORIAL

The Community We Seek, the Community We Build: The Beginning of the *Journal of Global Higher Education*

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We welcome readers to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Global Higher Education*. This journal started with a conversation in late 2023 around a simple question: "What do we want out of the scholarly community we invest our time and energy into?" As scholars of global higher education, we (the four editors) had crossed paths many times through shared editorial work, professional conferences, and in our scholarship (writing/reviewing). These discussions highlighted how we had all experienced the very best that academic communities can offer, but also some of their worst behaviors, assumptions, and values. On reflection, we were all at a point where we wanted more from the academic communities we served and sought tangible changes to the ways academic work, and publishing in particular, is approached. Academia and academic publishing can be cold, harsh, and overly competitive, but what if they did not have to be this way? What would happen if a community of scholars chose, instead, to support one another, to take developmental approaches to scholarship, and to foster knowledge creation which pushes the boundaries against rigid and normative frameworks? It was through these conversations that the *Journal of Global Higher Education* was born. Through a labor of love and commitment to developing the community we hoped and yearned for, we have now arrived at the first of, hopefully, many issues.

Though we (the four editors) come from different (professional and personal) backgrounds, career trajectories, and life experiences, we have a shared vision for this journal. This includes:

- Equitable representation of voices and knowledge across the community researching global higher education;
- An open access and independent, academic-owned space for scholarship to be developed, published, and supported;
- Criticality, rigor, and diverse uses of theories, methods, and perspectives to further expand our collective understanding of what higher education across the globe is and can be;

- A journal which acts as an extension of a relational community that is developed through a foundation of mutual respect and care, despite our potential differences or disagreements.

In the sections that follow, we elaborate more on how these four values led us to create this journal and what we hope the *Journal of Global Higher Education* can do differently.

Equitable Representation

To start, we use the term "global" to broadly refer to an awareness of the wider world, including the processes of global engagement, globalization, internationalization, and international mobilities among institutions, systems, and contexts of higher education. While there are many national contexts from which research can derive, too often what is seen and "counted" in established journals and policy resides are studies from so-called "Western," "Global North," or "Global Minority" sites (of research) and perspectives. We recognise there is much established, as well as emerging, knowledge from places, authors, and perspectives not commonly seen in many top journals in our field. Our existing publication structures in academia often privilege the knowledge, concepts, structures, and authors based in hegemonic and historically advantaged spaces.

The limited representation of global knowledge and voices in this research field is a leading reason why there are such narrow framings of higher education globally, in both research and practice (e.g., Buckner & Stein, 2020). Current normative perspectives on higher education globally often do not consider the scholarship, views, values, and positionalities of the "Global Majority," including those in the so-called "Global South" or scholars categorized in many marginalized groups within their contexts. Too often, these current dominant framings are not questioned, but rather are copied and applied to studies around the world, whether they are contextually and culturally appropriate or, more often, not. Our field often becomes limited by tick-box exercises in which guru authors are performatively cited (potentially not even read), the same conceptual framings are recycled, and expected normative views are repeated.

As editors, we want this journal to question, critique, and (re)think research about higher education differently. As such, we expect authors to be aware of the specificities of national contexts, situating local practices, research, issues, and reflections within a critical awareness of world history and contemporary geopolitics (meaning studies based in a single country should be framed for a global readership) (Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013). We also seek work which pushes the boundaries of theory, methods, and discourse used in research, aiming to open doors to new voices, new ideas, and new concepts. We do not believe that research can be "too critical," "too experimental," or "too political." We understand this might often mean our journal runs against current normative publication trends and expectations, but we encourage and support these endeavors.

At the same time, we are reflective on how our current academic and publishing structures limit who is able to volunteer for —or write in— a new, experimental journal.

The four of us are perhaps taking a professional risk by placing our efforts here, but it is a risk that is tempered by job security, flexibility in line management, access to resources, and institutional prestige (and the same applies to many on our wider editorial board). Despite our best aims for equitable representation, we will inevitably fall short because not all global scholars can safely take the time and energy to contribute to an unranked, unindexed new journal. But we hope to take that risk and develop the journal's reputation in the field so that, in the years to come, we can step down and see scholars less White, more globally representative, and more innovative than ourselves take ownership and leadership of the journal and its community.

Open Access and Independent

The *Journal of Global Higher Education* differs from most other journals in the field because we have purposefully designed a format that is fully open access (OA) and independent of a scholarly publisher. We consider this journal to be an academic-owned scholarly collective.

OA is a publishing model that makes research freely available to publish and access (e.g., DOAJ, 2025). Too often, scholarship in our field is hidden behind paywalls that limit its accessibility, even though some research is supported through public finances. Research across various contexts is frequently inaccessible to the very universities, participants, and communities they are intended to directly impact. This lack of access to publications impacts a wide range of potential beneficiaries, including independent scholars, prospective scholars, scholars based in institutions with more limited resources, and the general public. OA, therefore, promotes the ethical accessibility and development of higher education research and supports the ethical diffusion of ideas. We hope that this journal can lead not only to advancing communication among higher education scholars, but also to supporting a global understanding of higher education in our societies.

We make several commitments regarding OA, as founding editors of this journal. The first is that this journal does not have, and will never have, article processing charges (APCs) for authors. The second commitment is that this journal and all its contents are free to access, read, and use, and will always be this way. There are no costs (fees) or subscriptions required to read our published work. The copyright of all publications will also be retained with the authors, using a CC BY-NC 4.0 license that makes articles free to use and share by anyone with attribution. We believe APCs and scholarship behind paywalls to be unethical and detrimental to knowledge work (Al-Khatib, & Teixeira da Silva, 2017), and that not charging an APC or fee for reading promotes equitable and fair access to new knowledge, regardless of where one is located, one's career stage, or the resources backing one's research (Kadikilo et al., 2024). This approach places no limits on who can participate in the larger community of higher education research and scholarship.

We have also chosen not to affiliate with an academic publisher and function as an independent, academic-owned and -managed journal. This is because we have severe

concerns about the "value extraction model" (Jandric & Hayes, 2019, p. 5) seen from many academic publishers who sell the ideas and work we produce, write, and edit for free at a premium and primarily to their benefit (Buranyi, 2017). We also have concerns about the lack of ownership held over our knowledge, exemplified by the growing trend of academic publishers selling our writing to train artificial intelligence and large language models without our consent or permission (e.g., Kwon, 2024). To do something about this, we join the growing movement of independent, academic-owned journals (such as *Critical Internationalization Studies Review*, *Glossa*, *International Journal of African Higher Education*, or *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education*, among <u>others</u>). We hope this can serve as another blueprint for alternative publishing models for future communities.

With that said, there is a "cost" to this approach. We are truly indebted to the library and its staff at William & Mary (USA) who have graciously agreed to host the online platform at no cost to us and are assisting in technical support, keeping our webpages running and accessible. The remaining costs are compensation for the labor needed for this journal to operate. In other words, how do we compensate the editors, reviewers, copy editors, and social media team promoting the work of this journal without charging a fee to publish, access, or read? Similar to many journals owned by academic publishers, it's a simple answer for us: volunteer labor. We, the editorial board members, copy editing team, social media team, and reviewers, count the work associated with this journal as part of our scholarly duties, which are, hopefully, remunerated by our employers. As individuals, we do not get any financial compensation, support, or administrative resourcing for working with or for this journal. Although we are reflective of the limitations of this approach, we agreed, as an editorial team, on this because we established this journal for the love of the field, interest in high-quality scholarship, and a desire to move our field forward to where more individuals and groups are represented and included in the discourses of higher education globally. We are enormously grateful for the energy and goodwill demonstrated by those who have responded to our open call for editorial board members, who share this commitment and have contributed as volunteers to developing the journal's policies and practices now and in the years to come.

Criticality, Rigor, and Diversity of Methods and Theories

Though we are an academic journal, we will publish multiple types of scholarship beyond "traditional" research articles. We believe research articles form a foundation to scholarly community and communication, but they are not the only ways to do so. To that end, in addition to <u>research articles</u>, we are publishing <u>critical reflections</u> of the field which challenge existing understandings, research, and/or practices. We are also encouraging <u>practice articles</u> which highlight innovative, ethical, and/or critical approaches to working practices in higher education globally. We anticipate publishing a <u>creative section</u> (hopefully available in upcoming submission cycles) which will be open to experimental approaches and expressions to push the boundaries of what is

traditionally published in a journal. This diversity of formats reflects our desire to participate in established scholarly or practice communities, journals, and discussions while also transforming them to make spaces for alternative modalities and discourses.

To be clear, many currently available journals are wonderful scholarly outlets undertaking critical and creative work, and we value and respect the work done by colleagues in these spaces. We, as editors, have published—and will continue to publish—in many of these outlets moving forward. Many existing journals have substantially contributed to our field, and we are building on their initiatives and the knowledge they have disseminated over the years.

Our contention is that the field of higher education research and scholarship, overall, has become dominated by normative framings and publishing practices. In our view, this limits our knowledge and understanding of higher education globally. Our intention, then, is to provide additional avenues for authors to disrupt these practices. We aim to purposefully disrupt traditional and hierarchical models of journal publication and management. We desire to be inclusive of critiques of common understandings, practices, and modes of higher education existing globally. We do not subscribe to a singular framework of understanding of what higher education is, theoretically, methodologically, or in practice.

Subaltern voices, particularly in decolonial studies or those using other critical lenses, often struggle to publish in established journals where they are expected to carry through the epistemic and ontological premises of their work into the format, style, and approach of writing (Canagarajah, 2002). Proxy indicators of rigor—the inclusion of particular sections, specific citations, structuring the paper in a certain way, etc.—become our understandable heuristic frames for identifying good research. But when scholarship seeks to legitimately challenge aspects of this knowledge structure, it can be devalued, forced to fit into a mold, and compromised as a result. We want this journal to be a space where different understandings of rigor and quality can thrive and be debated, rather than compromised.

This means we support and advocate for a wide range of methods, theories, structures, styles, and practices not normally seen in established journals. We also recognize this may take time and reflection to develop across the field, given the weight of these normative expectations is so heavy. As such, this first issue is just a starting point. We commit to the ongoing development of the journal in this regard, holding space for discussing bold ideas and suggestions from the community as we carry forward.

Community Development

In developing this journal, we have strived to be transparent and open in our communications. This started with the initial design discussions of the journal and expanded to the recruitment of editorial board members. We see this journal as an extension of a larger, active, and vibrant scholarly community. As a journal, we pledge to forever be community-owned and -developed. We seek to disrupt the gatekeeping that

can result from normative framing and practices which limit participation in scholarly communities and, in turn, our understandings of higher education globally.

To be transparent, we engaged in discussions with a wide range of global scholars as we developed this journal, some of whom eventually joined the editorial board and others who did not have capacity to do so. These voices included early career scholars, as well as well-established voices in our field (a few of whom have contributed greatly to our current understandings and scholarship). We have recruited a peer review team and are supporting them through training to develop peer review as an epistemic habit that derives from openness, rather than "conservative, biased, and contentious practice" (Shefer et al., 2023, p. 148).

As part of our community development plans, we have undertaken several actions to ensure this journal is community-focused and community-operated in the long term, owned by the many and not dictated by the few. A few examples of steps we have taken include:

- A planned rotation of editorship with each founding editor stepping down after the journal hits established key measures/event targets. This succession planning will ensure the journal lives beyond—and is not dominated by—its founding editors;
- A commitment that lead editors will not publish articles we author in this journal for the duration of our time as editors (note: this commitment does not apply to the wider editorial board, including Section, Associate, and Assistant editors, although we have anonymized peer review practices in place to ensure papers are published on merit, not by scholarly clout);
- Established term limits for the wider editorial board roles to allow transition of membership/roles and encourage the participation and development of editorial skills for all community members;
- Established mentorship through a developmental route for publication, particularly focused on earlier career scholars and those who desire greater mentoring in publishing;
- Training for all reviewers, with development, supportiveness, and kindness as key pillars of our ethos for peer review processes;
- Future webinar events about developing articles and publishing in our journal;
- A social media team whose strategies aim to encourage discussion and debate about published articles, while also providing direct access to the editorial team for questions or suggestions;
- Preliminary steps to establish this journal as a charity in the United Kingdom.

We have established partnerships with key organizations already shaping our field in a critical direction and are open to establishing more in the future. Currently, we serve as a key publication outlet for *Research with International Students* (RIS) and the *Critical Internationalization Studies Network* (CISN). Our initial schedule for a publication plan includes one issue this year (this issue) and at least two issues each for 2026 and 2027, although we will post new articles online as they are accepted.

In summary, the *Journal of Global Higher Education* aspires to be not just an academic journal, but also a community that actively works towards equitable collaboration with all scholars, aiming to include our readership in our operational development moving forward. We desire to change cultures around peer review, disavowing exercises of power and gatekeeping while embracing constructive, dialogic, and kind processes. While we will not compromise on academic rigor, we make a firm commitment to help each other do better research and to recognize that researchers, scholars, and research participants are humans, with feelings and lives that deserve basic respect and care.

This First Issue

We are launching this journal along with the publication of its first issue. This first issue was by invitation, as we wanted to start the journal with a showcase of example articles. We invited authors within and beyond our networks because they, their perspectives, methods, and theories are emblematic of what we aspire to publish. All articles were anonymously peer reviewed to the standard we expect for all future articles. Some of these articles were written by authors who are earlier in their careers, while others are well-established and familiar voices in the field. However, these articles are just a starting point, and they are not intended to be blueprints for all future formats. We look forward to continuously developing our approaches and hearing from new voices in the future in novel ways.

We recognize that the efforts undertaken to publish this first issue have taken a great deal of effort and time from many individuals and groups, including (but not limited to) our full editorial board, our team of copy editors, our social media team, and innumerable people who have offered advice, guidance, and critique along the way (and these people have been listed below). We immensely appreciate their support to make this journal and first issue possible. This shared vision of what a journal can be motivates not just us as individuals, but as a community of global scholars.

Finally, we end with you, the reader. Thank you for taking the time to read this first issue and for your future contributions to the *Journal of Global Higher Education*. We know that publishing in a new, unestablished journal might be seen as a risk, but we hope it is a risk you are willing to take with us, to demonstrate an alternative vision of what high quality publishing can be. We look forward to your thoughts and feedback, and we always welcome suggestions on how to develop this journal, which we see as a continual work in progress, but one that belongs to all of us, as a community.

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AI Statement

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