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Transforming Higher Education*

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Editor's Note

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Editors' Note

Gabi Cuna & Robyn Suchy

Gabi Cuna (they/them) is a second-year graduate student in the Masters of Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration Program and the Graduate Assistant for Diversity and Community Engagement in the College of Education and Social Services at The University of Vermont. They earned their B.A. in Psychology from California State University, Fullerton, where they found a passion for post-secondary educational access and supporting students from historically marginalized backgrounds.

Robyn Suchy (he/him) is a second-year graduate student in the Masters of Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration Program at The University of Vermont and is the Co-Editor of 44th volume of The Vermont Connection Journal. Robyn earned his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and English with minors in social justice and women and gender studies. He currently works at The University of Vermont Prism Center as the Student Empowerment Coordinator and continues to be inspired by student passion, leadership, and drive to build a better, more just, world.

“I choose love. I wear my wise heart on my chest: full and open, both as a sword and shield from the hate, fear, intolerance, and violence that is so prevalent in today’s academic setting. Love is my gift to this vocation and all students. Love is my act of resistance.”

–Tonantzin Oseguera, Ed.D. (HESA ‘01)

We are thrilled to present the 44th volume of The Vermont Connection Journal to you. This year’s journal theme is “Planting Seeds of Hope: Transforming Higher Education,” and, as the Co-Editors, we hope you will leave this volume feeling renewed, challenged, and inspired.

As the second volume of the TVC Journal that is presented in an entirely digital format, we encouraged authors to challenge the norms of traditional academic publishing and submit artwork, audio recordings, photos, scholarly personal narratives, and other creative avenues of expression, alongside scholarly articles. This goal of challenging traditional ideas of scholarship was two-fold: 1) to highlight the ways in which knowledge is generated, constructed, and shared outside of western standards of academia and; 2) to balance the overwhelming number of articles that center the (many) failings of our field.

When we sat down over a year ago to discuss our hopes for the 44th volume of The Vermont Connection Journal, we had one major goal: we wanted to leave our friends, colleagues, faculty, and field with a love note. We wanted to center hope and joy and all of the ways, big and small, that we as student affairs and higher education professionals change the world. When we asked The Vermont Connection and HESA community at large what themes they would like to see uplifted in this year's journal, we were delighted to see that our own desires for hope and happiness were reflected in the larger community. We received theme proposals that centered compassionate growth, envisioning higher education as a liberatory force, radical hope, and kindness as pedagogy. We felt affirmed and validated in knowing that like us, there were scholars and practitioners eager to explore how hope, love, kindness, and compassion can play a crucial role in freedom dreaming a better higher education system.

If you spend just a few minutes skimming the headlines on higher education news sites, any number of scholarly journals, or social media on any given day, you will likely be met with violence (historical and current), despair, anger, uncertainty, and questions of why we continue to be part of institutions that can seem irredeemable. In our offices, division meetings, and classrooms we center the stories and experiences of oppression as we desperately try to avoid mistakes of the past, repair the harm of the present, and apply the things we're learning to next year or the year after. But we don't often learn about how to dream of a world built on a foundation of love.

Love in the face of capitalism, institutional violence and the corrosion of education as a public good is a radical act. And we're not talking about a 'labor of love:' the ways we've been tricked to give more and more of ourselves to jobs and trustees and administrators who do not reciprocate our vulnerability, dedication, and passion. Dr. Durrelle Brooks (2023) defines love as "...the capacity, will, and courage to nourish and affirm one's self, another, and community towards unapologetic wholeness and completeness." We hope to build upon a foundation of this kind of love. Love that uplifts. Love that embraces all of us in our flaws and our triumphs. Love that transforms.

We don't delude ourselves, love certainly cannot solve all the world's problems; but it seems like as good a place as any to start. So, thank you, our readers, authors, mentors, ancestors, and revolutionary scholars who have come before us and will come after us, for planting seeds of hope to rebuild higher education grounded in love.

With love and in community,
Gabi Cuna & Robyn Suchy
The Vermont Connection 44 Journal Co-Editors

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