

Reflections from the Editorial Team: Recognizing Our Volunteers, and Celebrating *Reflections*' 30th Anniversary

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Abstract: Our general issues of *Reflections* would not be possible without the incredible commitment of Section Editors and peer reviewers who volunteer their time to the submission and review process. Their dedication and expertise are the lifeblood of this journal. Those persons who have reviewed and provided valuable feedback to the authors whose work has been published in the last four General Issues are listed below. Prose and poetry in this Issue reveal the importance of community-building, interpersonal relationships, and engagement in the lives of students, practitioners, and service users across settings and around the world.

Keywords: volunteers, reviewers, interpersonal relationships, engagement, community-building

Appreciation to Our Volunteers

In our previous Issue, while we thanked our Section Editors who are rolling off—many of whom had been with us for over a decade—and we send well-wishes as they move into different areas of their lives. We also shared our excitement in welcoming new volunteers who joined us as Section Editors. These are the names authors will encounter when they submit new manuscripts: **Cathy McElderry** is our Section Editor for Teaching and Learning. **Anh Ngo** joined Pat Gray as co-Editor of our Practice Section. **Brie Radis** is our Section Editor of the Practicum Education Section. **Tiffany Baffour** and **Kenya Jones** are serving as the Co-Editors of the Research Section. Our Section Editors volunteer their valuable time and expertise to the submission and review process. We are so grateful for their commitment and expertise. Thank you!!

We are delighted that Salem State University remains as the Publisher of *Reflections* under the able leadership of **Beth Massaro**. **Jack Pincelli** continues to invest his highly thoughtful and caring attention as our *Reflections* Lead Copyeditor. This Issue also benefited from the copyediting knowledge and skills of **Keegan McGowan** and the attention and diligence of **Afsana Rahman**. As they both are new graduates, we know that their writing and the people they work with will benefit from knowing them. We cannot say enough about **Justin Snow**, whose expertise in e-scholarship contributes to the overall process of publication. You will also remember that we shared our excitement and gratitude to the Special Commission to Advance Macro Social Work as the new fiscal sponsor of *Reflections*. This means that you will be directed to the Special Commission's [website](#) to make your tax-deductible [donations](#) to the journal. Thank you!!

Behind the scenes are two groups of volunteers without whom *Reflections* would simply not exist. They are our publishing partners, reflecting colleges and universities who are steadfast in their dedication of time, thought, and finances: University of Georgia School of Social Work, Howard University School of Social Work, California State University Long Beach School of Social Work, and Monmouth University School of Social Work.

Last, yet certainly not “least,” are our volunteer reviewers, who are invited by our Section Editors to read manuscripts and provide formative feedback to our authors. Their value cannot be overestimated, and it is a joy for us to recognize the incredible gifts they bestow upon *Reflections*. Since their efforts are so critical to what we do, we focus our editorial team “reflections” on the importance of peer review as an act of generativity in which the knowledge and experience of the reviewer is a gift to the author.

In Recognition of Our Peer Reviewers for *Reflections* 2024–2025 General Issues

Peer review is a term dating over a thousand years ago to define a process used to evaluate the professional and ethical standards used by physicians; over time this gatekeeping function became the “gold standard” (Chong & Lin, 2024, p. 1) for evaluating the quality of submitted manuscripts in academic publishing. Various models of peer review have emerged, with double-blind peer review being the most common, meaning the author does not know who the reviewer is and the reviewer does not know the author’s identity. As with most models, there have been debates over how to approach peer review, but “it is irrefutable that feedback provided by reviewers is at the core of journal peer review, regardless of the model a journal adopts” (Chong & Lin, 2024, p. 2).

From its beginnings over 30 years ago, *Reflections* adopted the double-blind peer review approach to evaluating submitted manuscripts. Submissions for our General Issues come into one of four sections: Practice, Teaching & Learning, Practicum Education, and Research. Section Editors read each manuscript to determine if it is ready to be sent to Reviewers. If not, Editors communicate with authors about why their work is not ready for review. It may be that a manuscript would be better targeted to another journal or doesn’t yet fully address *Reflections* guidelines. In the latter case, Section Editors try to provide helpful feedback and answer questions about how the author might better address the guidelines. If the manuscript seems to be a good fit for the journal, then it is sent to “Review” and the Editor assigns two Reviewers based on their areas of expertise. Reviewers are sent automatic gentle reminders if their response and/or their review is overdue.

We have been so fortunate to have had a list of committed Reviewers who care about *Reflections*, many of whom have published their own work in the journal. But *Reflections*, like so many other professional journals, faces an ever-increasing challenge in updating lists of Reviewers and competing with so many demands that leave professional people with limited time to review. For example, one group of journal editors shared having seen “situations where more than 20 potential Reviewers were contacted without one agreeing to review” (Mendenhall et al., 2024, p. 2), and extensions of time are often requested by those who agree to review. A peer review crisis has been the subject of editorials in professional journals, given the expanding length of time it takes to engage at least two reviewers and resulting in long delays for authors in getting feedback (Parrish, 2022; Parrish, 2024).

Many *Reflections* reviewers are affiliated with academic institutions, with some being scholarly practitioners/“pracademics” who wear both practitioner and academic hats. Yet no matter the settings in which they work, “both internal and external forces are at work ... shaping the

[publishing] industry into something new—AI, promotion and tenure expectations, plagiarism/copyright concerns, reliance on unpaid labor, open access, paper mills” (Mendenhall et al, 2024, p. 3). Reviewers are often asked to click boxes by which they agree that they have not downloaded papers nor had AI write the review. Early career professionals may be advised that reviewing manuscripts takes valuable time away from the time spent writing their own manuscripts. Reviewers not tethered to academic institutions may have little incentive to review manuscripts when their agency work leaves little time for professional service, and there is no acknowledgement or expectation that this type of service is valued.

We recognize how difficult it is to find the time for peer review and to adjust to the rapidly changing forces at play in the publishing process, and this makes it even more important to underscore and acknowledge just how valuable our Reviewers are. Amid the time constraints and the fact that reviews are a “behind the scenes” anonymous process is the impetus that peer review is an opportunity for co-learning. Reading new work and providing feedback is a constructive process in which the reviewer encounters new ideas and ways of thinking, just as authors receive the gift of generativity from reviewers who value the desire to contribute their time and expertise positively to the next generation of writers.

We know that the grand tradition of peer review is the lifeblood of *Reflections*. Reviewers volunteer by dedicating their time to evaluating manuscripts so that their feedback might be used to support and strengthen authors’ valuable contributions. We are forever grateful for our Reviewers’ tireless commitment to the quality of each publication, and we extend our most heartfelt appreciation to those 55 volunteer Reviewers who contributed their time and expertise by reviewing the articles in *Reflections* General Issues published in 2024–2025.

The following reviewers provided three or more reviews for *Reflections* in Volumes 30–31:

Nathaniel L. Currie	C. Lee Anne Deegan	Elba Figueroa
Nanette I. Fleischer	Steven Granich	Sarah Louise Hessianauer
Katherine Mary Kranz	Nathan Perkins	Cathryne L. Schmitz
Johanna Slivenske		

The following reviewers provided one or two reviews for *Reflections* in Volumes 30–31:

Rosemary Barbera	Joan Marie Blakey	Shena Brown
Monit Cheung	Emily Cox	Nanette I. Fleischer
James Angelo Forte	Charles Garvin	Alex Gitterman
Annette Grape	Jay Hall	Anthony J. Hill
Erica Goldblatt Hyatt	Maryam Kahn	Tiffany Y. Lane
Carol Langer	Shonda Kaye Lawrence	Patricia Levy
Jane Isaacs Lowe	Angie Mann-Williams	Jane McPherson
Jane Miller	Matthias Naleppa	Patti Ann Nishimoto
Kanako Okuda	Jamie Peralta	Matt Price
Yvette Lashone Pye	Arlene Reilly-Sandoval	Jerry Reynolds
Tawana Ford Sabbath	Johanna Silvinske	Jessica Sniatecki

William Patrick Sullivan	Cardia Swift	Amie Thurber
Sherita L. Tompkins	Lara Vanderhoof	Quenette Walton
Tracy R. Whitaker	Collette D. Williams	Victoria R. Winbush

Many thanks for all that you do to make *Reflections* possible!!

Highlights of This Issue

In this Issue we begin with two very moving articles that offer insights into international practice.

Swargiary's story brings the reader into a world of turbulence and uncertainty, fraught with violence but tempered by the strength of women during the Bodoland Movement in India. Building on that strength, Swargiary recounts the journey of becoming a social work professional who seeks to model empathy and compassion as well as respect for all humanity and is grateful for having had strong role models.

The next article is written by Machinga-Asalou who was born and raised in Zimbabwe, moved to the United States, and became a social work student. The incredible challenges experienced by international students compelled the author to write about navigating immigration and educational policies and to share what was learned from interviews with other international students. Both Swargiary and Machinga-Asalou broaden our horizons and reveal what courage it has taken to pursue their dreams of becoming professional helpers.

The following three articles focus on creative ways of community-building.

Koller writes about the development of a university-community partnership between transgender and gender nonbinary artists and filmmakers 50+ and social work students on campus. Designed to foster town-gown connections and to engage students with underrepresented groups, a series of events and opportunities for connection created a space of belonging in which community members and students learn from one another.

Paez and colleagues detail their experiences in community-building among students and faculty in two schools of social work in southern California during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sharing strategies used to build an intercampus collaboration, they focus on how they created a safe place for dealing with institutional racism and oppression, as well as moving toward collective action.

Community-building within a school of social work is highlighted by Whitney and colleagues. Their story is about an inspiring senior faculty member who organized a writing group for junior faculty members during the COVID pandemic. In a time of great uncertainty a safe place in which to bond is created, and these relationships give the group strength in the face of a major shared loss. All three articles speak to the importance of developing in-depth human relationships.

The next two contributions include prose and poetry, both of which provide insight into how helping professionals use their experiences with and as service recipients to engage in a co-learning process.

Saulnier brings personal experience as a foster parent into the classroom so that students hear first-hand how policies and programs impact families and children that encounter the child welfare system with all its challenges. Committed to integrating real-world experiences into the curriculum, Saulnier shares the lessons learned from being an advocate for children both personally and professionally.

Silk's poem takes the reader into a medical outreach team's emotional journey as they navigate the uncertain world of persons who are unhoused. As helping professionals intervene with service users, they are painfully aware that their clients are subject to mandates that remove tents and shelters, disrupt the services they receive, and turn them into nomads as they face frequent displacement.

Our final two articles focus on working with students in the mental health professions to develop knowledge and skills while continuing to recognize the emotional aspects of learning.

Jackson Nevels, Erickson, and Lewis take the reader into a Veterans Administration hospital in which students are assigned to patients in the burn unit and the traumatic brain injury unit. Given the potential for experiencing vicarious traumatization as students witness pain and suffering, the authors offer ways in which supervisors can support student resilience.

Donnelly, Nandan, and Rhue reflect on what was learned about community-based mental health challenges when faculty and students teamed up to study the content of 911 calls. This article reveals lessons learned about interprofessional collaboration, how those lessons can be integrated into curriculum, and how important it is to reflect on the values learned in the process.

The articles in this Issue reveal the importance of community-building, interpersonal relationships, and engagement in the lives of students, practitioners, and service users across settings and around the world. We trust you will find this Issue as you find all of *Reflections*—full of compelling narrative accounts that offer insights that will be useful to multiple professions, educators, practitioners, students, and others alike. Once again, we look forward to hearing from you!!

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With Gratitude...

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As we prepare to step into our 31st year, we remain committed to our *Reflections* founders, Sonia and Paul Abeles, in making their dreams manifest. With your continued commitment to *Reflections* and its authors, we look forward to the many, many decades ahead!!