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Editor's Note

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INQUIRY

EDITOR'S NOTE

This special issue of *Inquiry: The Journal of the Virginia Community Colleges* arrives as the landscape of higher education has been profoundly impacted by a worldwide pandemic. The effects of COVID-19 have been felt in all areas of our colleges, and we have all reimagined how our classrooms, offices, student support centers, professional development events, and learning resources can continue to promote student success while foregrounding equity.

In this summer issue, scholars across Virginia cover a wide range of concerns but share a commonality: putting students first. The articles that we are proudly publishing include research-based studies that evolved over several months as authors closely engaged the in-depth guidance of Editorial Board members, practical strategies and reviews of pedagogical tips for higher education professionals, and works that were intended to be shared in Roanoke at our annual New Horizons conference. Those latter contributions are grouped in a New Horizons Showcase.

The combined efforts resulted in accessible, relevant scholarship that will stimulate conversation among faculty, staff, and administrative leaders about our practices, pedagogy, and policies in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) and worldwide. I look forward to seeing and hearing these sustained discussions on our campuses, at conferences, and in digital spaces.

Four research-based studies cover a wide range of concerns but share a commonality: putting students first. Rebecca Evans, Don Stansberry, Kim E. Bullington, and Dana Burnett study the perceptions and experiences of first-generation students at two quite different institutions and note the obstacles faced by this population, particularly those who are enrolled part-time. Todd Platts and Kim Hoosier provide practical strategies for stereotype threat reduction in social science classrooms and acknowledge the structural concerns that need to be addressed.

Repeat *Inquiry* contributor Yuemin He offers strategies for developing a learning-focused syllabus and shares findings of a questionnaire of community college students and their

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expectations of an effective syllabus. In her study, Mary Tedrow analyzes student reflections on their identities as writers throughout the course of their freshman composition courses.

A Notes in Brief contribution by Zachary Beamer continues a conversation in our journal regarding mathematics corequisites. Beamer explains the research behind the transition to the Direct Enrollment Pilot and addresses misunderstandings regarding its implementation in the VCCS. Christian Aguiar returns with another book review, this time exploring Flower Darby and James M. Lang's *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes*, a text that features small, high-impact updates that faculty can make to their online classes.

The three works featured in our New Horizons showcase – contributions that were initially designed for a face-to-face audience but have instead been transformed into published *Inquiry* material – include a PowerPoint and two Notes in Brief. Lauren K. Foster illustrates how service learning and reflection can engage students in understanding real-world concerns and cultural impacts. Melissa Stange contends that critical soft skills are as important as technical skills for students entering careers in the digital age. Matthew "Seth" Helmandollar provides an overview of Canvas tools for assisting in student success via advising and coaching.

Thank you to everyone who downloads, reads, talks about, and submits to *Inquiry*. The journal reached 30,000 total downloads in early August, and we sincerely appreciate all of your support. The *Inquiry* editorial board and I hope that you find these scholarly contributions as fascinating and thought-provoking as we do, and we encourage you to add your voice to our next issue.

We also send our best wishes for good health and safety for all of our VCCS colleagues and their families as well as all readers worldwide.