

## Editors' Note

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We are pleased to present this special issue of the *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership* highlighting a selection of papers from the 16th Coalition for Education in the Outdoors (CEO) Biennial Research Symposium. In January 2024, for the second time, the CEO symposium was held at the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly Conference Center in scenic Black Mountain, North Carolina. This year, 119 members of the outdoor education (OE) community attended the symposium. Another 25 educators and students gathered for a pre-symposium workshop on connections between OE and formal schooling.

The broader outdoor education (OE) community is regarded as a close-knit one whose members enjoy the strong support and encouragement of their colleagues. More recently, the OE community has collectively taken a critical look at itself to examine how this quality, which is a strength in many regards, may create challenges for new professionals looking to enter the field. We believe that several key features of the CEO symposium make it one of those unique and welcoming entry points for new professionals. For example, the symposium is designed to create a highly interactive atmosphere. The plenary style allows all attendees to be present at every presentation. Socials that put OE principles into practice provide opportunities to “break the ice” and bring people together. And, on a more pragmatic note, the conference organizers continue to work intentionally to ensure that the CEO symposium remains affordable.

Due to these features, the CEO symposium has earned a reputation as a conference that is friendly to professionals who are just starting their careers. Indeed, this year there was a lot of excitement and enthusiasm from and for the many graduate students who attended and presented their work, many of whom were doing so at a conference for the first time. This special issue proudly includes a number of articles co-authored by some of these new professionals.

As the OE field continues to evolve, we expect that entry to the profession will remain a critical conversation. Spaces like the CEO symposium can continue to play a vital role in welcoming and establishing a supportive mentorship network budding professionals. Mentorship is often vital to an individual's success in any field, and the importance of opportunities to develop these relationships should not be underestimated. We are committed to ensuring that the CEO symposium remains a welcoming space within our field as well as a space that allows professionals to explore new ways to expand that welcome beyond.

To that end, the first article featured in this special issue examines belongingness in college outdoor orientation programs. While such programs are designed, in part, to foster belongingness, authors Brent J. Bell, Jorich Horner, Trevor Guilmette, and Katriana Kivari discuss how some participants actually end up experiencing exclusion. Their study “Addressing the gaps in belongingness: A qualitative investigation of student exclusion on outdoor orientation programs”

resulted in a new model—the Belongingness Assessment Model—which may help inform facilitation techniques and leadership approaches in outdoor programming.

Authors Stephanie Fiocca, Sarah J. Carrier, and Jill McGowan also investigate the intersection of outdoor recreation and education. In this second article, these authors present the findings of their qualitative study titled “Turning science lessons inside out: Professional development for elementary school teachers’ outdoor instruction.” By completing and analyzing interviews with elementary school teachers, the authors illuminate how a series of three professional development workshops can help teachers implement outdoor science instruction. The success of these workshops was found to be influenced by the teachers’ prior experience in the outdoors, their ability to connect the outdoor environment with academic content, and their impressions of how their students would react to the outdoor environment. Additionally, the authors identify patterns in some of the barriers teachers face that may discourage them from adopting outdoor learning environments.

Barriers to teachers’ use of outdoor learning environments was the focus of the third article featured titled “Barriers and strategies for utilizing school outdoor spaces: Exploring the experiences of high school teachers in the southeastern U.S.” by Erin Waddell, Andrew J. Bobilya, W. Brad Faircloth, Brad Daniel, and Ashley Hoffman. Specifically, these authors utilized survey research techniques to understand the barriers to outdoor instruction experienced by high school teachers. Furthermore, the authors also describe the strategies some teachers utilized to overcome these barriers, providing important implications for practice.

In the fourth article, Kate Moscouper, Jayson Seaman, Cindy Hartman, Andrew Coppens, and Hannah Falcone examine how recreation may or may not play a role in young people’s decisions to leave a rural community in the article “Exploring the role of recreation in rural NH youths’ negotiation of master narratives.” Across the United States, many rural communities experience population declines as youth move away from their home communities when they reach adulthood. The authors’ qualitative study centered on master narratives, which they defined as culturally shared stories, and their results highlight how recreation experiences influence youths’ interpretation of these master narratives and their decision-making process on whether to stay or leave their home communities.

Next, Anja Whittington, Jeffrey Aspelmeier, and Jay Raymond, authors of “Attitudes and beliefs of men’s and women’s experiences thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail,” present their survey research findings in the fifth article featured in this special issue. Though more similarities were observed, they found that significant differences between men and women related to several different perceived hiking-related concerns and benefits. Such differences are critical for outdoor recreation managers and researchers to recognize as they can lead to inequitable outcomes for the growing population of people pursuing long-distance hiking.

In the sixth article of the special issue, authors Kayler DeBrew, Callie Spencer Schultz, Paul Stonehouse, Luc Cousineau, and Vincent Russell present a critique of outdoor adventure in “Confronting and (re)constructing ‘conquest culture’ in outdoor adventure: A critical analysis of #microadventure content on Facebook and Instagram.” Their qualitative analysis of Facebook and Instagram content tagged with #microadventure draws attention to how this content reinforces or resists conquest culture, which the authors describe as a combination of social privilege, individualism, and exploitation that is pervasive in many U.S. outdoor adventure spaces. This work highlights the need to continually evaluate how visual representations can affect the image, accessibility, and inclusivity of outdoor adventure recreation.

Lastly, in a commentary article, authors Dan McCole, Elizabeth E. Perry, Andrew J. Bobilya, Madison M. Janes, and Travis Owens discuss issues relevant to land management and higher education in “A data-based discussion about land management decisions that limit access to protected areas.” Using an example from the Manistee River Trail, the authors highlight how partnerships between outdoor education programs and land management agencies can be lever-

aged to gather information needed to make data-driven management decisions. As non-motorized outdoor recreation participation remains high in protected areas, these conversations on how to balance conservation, education, and recreation will continue to be relevant.

We hope you will consider submitting an abstract and/or attending the 17th CEO Biennial Research Symposium February 6-8, 2026. The call for abstracts will be distributed and available in late spring 2025 on the CEO website. We are also pleased to share that *JOREL* is going to partner with the Coalition to publish a special issue of selected manuscripts focused on work shared at the symposium. By attending and sharing your perspective, you will be contributing to the continued growth and diversification of outdoor education.