



Guest Editorial

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“Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.”

~ Bruce Lee

Some of us have read by now the scathing critique of Cornel West, published this year by Michael Eric Dyson in *The New Republic*. In his article, Dyson, a best-selling author and a professor of sociology at Georgetown University, characterizes West as having undergone a “pronounced and decades-long scholarly decline.” Among other factors, Dyson points to the arguable paucity and lack of originality of West’s written output since his book *Race Matters* was published in 1993, and he presents this as evidence of West’s diminished impact as an intellectual. According to Dyson, West recycles his old ideas in bouts of impassioned oratory. Yet, it is the writing that matters in scholarly discourse and there is far too little of it coming from West these days, in Dyson’s view.

There are many reasons to be both intrigued and troubled by Dyson’s polemical essay, but I believe at least one of his points rings true: “Writing demands a different sort of apprenticeship to ideas than does speaking.” In my opinion, excellent research and scholarship require a deep commitment to the arduous practice of writing, a dedication to the distilling of ideas and crafting of words. This can be intimidating even for the most experienced among us. The written works we produce can carry more weight in the scholarly world than other forms of communication. This in turn demands a high standard of academic integrity and honesty to which we must adhere. Scrutiny and criticism should be expected and welcomed in this exchange; yet it does take courage to make one’s ideas so vulnerable in the real world.

Every time I write, I face the blank page in front of me with humility and wonder. How can I convey my thoughts in the most cogent, meaningful, and effective language possible? As Dyson affirms, the act of writing compels us to revisit our concepts, hone our words, revise and repeat this process again and again in order to communicate ideas worthy of the endeavor. The process can be difficult and frustrating, yet many are compelled to participate in it anyway, despite the risks. Why is this the case? I suspect that contributors to *OUR Journal* will agree with my take, that what keeps us engaged are the exhilarating effects that come from the practice of writing when it is fruitful. It can lead to joyful discovery, the thrill of producing a beautiful new piece, the headiness of generating an original theory. Learning how to share our experiences and ideas successfully with others seems to make the endless hours of practice worth it.

The inscriptions over the east and west doors of the University of Oregon’s Knight Library read: “Ye shall know the truth” — “And the truth shall make you free.” These are lofty statements, but we cannot realize them without hard work and perseverance. We join a “conversation” within

our disciplines and professions when we contribute to the scholarly literature. The voices in that discussion are represented in seemingly countless articles, treatises, and books available within and beyond the library. Thus, the act of writing requires the companion act of critical reading, in my perspective. Copious reading inspires, informs, and nurtures the strenuous practice of writing. When we aim to create new knowledge and contribute to the discourse, I believe we must deliberately invest in more time for reading and contemplation to understand the contexts in which we think, make connections, and see new relationships. There is pleasure and satisfaction in this practice of reading, in strengthening our intellectual capacity, just as a marathon runner endures rigorous training to prepare her mind and body for the next race.

The written word, once contained in the scholarly literature, helps us expand our stores of knowledge for humankind. As a librarian, I value all parts of this fascinating ecosystem, the process and the products, and I welcome the opportunity to add your scholarly works to our collections one day. I hope you think of librarians as your partners and guides as you navigate this complex world, now and in the future. The library writ large can be a catalyst for your reading and writing practice; it can serve as your intellectual home in the many days of exciting inquiry still ahead.