

ARTISTS' STATEMENT

Judith M. Pechacek and Lena Skvagerson

Trail Blazer, Blanket knitted with hand-dyed merino wool, 2026

Designed by Lena Skvagerson.

Knitted by Judith Pechacek using 12 skeins (various colors) of hand dyed Madeline Tosh Blanket 100% Superwash Merino Wool, Worsted Weight, 115g/200 yds.

Abstract

Artist's Statement for the cover art of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*, Volume 13, Issue 1: *Trail Blazer*, blanket knitted with hand-dyed merino wool.

Key words: boundary spanning, knitting, weaving, partnership, cover art

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From the designer's perspective, **TRAIL BLAZER** began as an exploration of texture, color movement, and knitter engagement. As a commercial knit and crochet designer, my goal is to create patterns that are visually interesting while guiding makers through techniques that build confidence over time.

Each section of the blanket introduces a different stitch pattern, while the changing colors keep the knitting dynamic and rewarding throughout a large project. While a pattern provides the structure, it is the knitter who ultimately brings the piece to life, transforming written instructions into a finished textile through their own hands, rhythm, and persistence.

The name **TRAIL BLAZER** also reflects the experience of knitting the piece. The blanket unfolds section by section, with each stitch pattern creating a new path forward for the maker to explore. Like many large projects, the process becomes a journey, with each completed section marking progress along the trail until the full landscape of the design finally emerges.

Patterns travel far beyond the designer's studio, and it is always inspiring to see how makers interpret them and bring them to life in their own way.

From the Knitters perspective, TRAIL BLAZER is a narrative in fiber, a woven piece of art that I began making in Minnesota this past year amidst a world in profound flux. Composed of 12 distinct skeins of yarn, the blanket began as a series of isolated patterns, each honoring the singular identity of a specific color. However, just as the world shifted during its creation, so too did the work. The boundaries between the skeins began to dissolve, shifting from monolithic blocks to complex, multi-tonal patterns that required a deeper level of structural integration.

My work on this project and the leadership course I was teaching became a year-long exploration, parallel to our times, of how diversity, when intentionally integrated, transforms from a collection of parts into an impermeable whole. As a nursing professor of leadership students it is important that I share with my students new ways of leading through these unprecedented and challenging times. Hence my work to find transferable metaphors of Boundary spanning concepts (Ernst and Chrobot-Mason, 2011) into real world actions.

Reflecting on the work of Ernst and Chrobot-Mason (2011), this project reimagines the leader as a "Weaver." In Boundary-Spanning leadership, weaving allows groups to retain their unique essence while coming together to innovate. In **TRAIL BLAZER**, the "strength of differences" is not just aesthetic; it is structural. By combining the knowledge of the designer's vision with the knitter's technical execution, we moved toward a state of intergroup innovation.

During the year-long creation of **TRAIL BLAZER**, the global landscape underwent a seismic shift. The societal narrative moved toward a redefinition of the "immigrant" as an outsider rather than a contributor, and a climate emerged where diversity was treated as a liability and differences were actively shunned. As borders—both physical and ideological—stiffened into walls, the process of making this blanket became an act of resistance.

In Boundary Spanning Leadership, Ernst and Chrobot-Mason (2011) distinguish between Borders (which limit and divide) and Frontiers (the space where new possibilities emerge). While the world was retreating into "Us vs. Them" silos, the **TRAIL BLAZER** project moved in the opposite direction. We transformed the 12 disparate skeins from isolated "immigrants" in a basket into an integrated community of color. Instead of allowing the individual colors to remain segregated—which would have created a blanket of hard, unyielding stripes—we practiced Weaving. We chose to interlace the boundaries, creating a "Nexus Effect" where the combination of colors produced a vibrancy that no single skein could achieve alone.

The partnership between the designer and the knitter became a microcosm of the world we wished to see. In a time when collaboration across differences is being devalued, our work required:

- **Integration of Knowledge:** Initially, the designer provided the map and the knitter followed the path. As the patterns grew more complex, this hierarchy shifted. We began to integrate the designer's aesthetic goals with the knitter's

tactile understanding of tension and fiber behavior, resulting in a more resilient fabric

- **Suspending Judgment:** We had to move past the initial "essence" of each yarn to see its potential for interdependence.
- **Trusting the process:** The designer let the pattern out in the world trusting the knitters would let them know revisions were needed and the knitter needed to trust their gauge that enough yarn would be available to finish the blanket.
- **Securing the Strands:** Recognizing that the "unraveling" seen in society could easily happen in our work, we focused on the structural integrity of the joins—the places where one identity met another.
- **Radical Integration:** By the time the blanket reached its full size, the patterns were no longer about single colors. They were complex, integrated systems.

The final "wet finishing" of the blanket stands as a direct response to a fractured world. While society attempted to separate and categorize, we bathed the fibers together, allowing them to lose their rigidity and find a shared, permanent home within the whole. **TRAIL BLAZER** is more than a textile; it is a proof of concept that our differences, when woven with intention, do not weaken the fabric—they make it impermeable.

References

Ernst, C., & Chrobot-Mason, D. (2011). *Boundary spanning leadership: Six practices for solving problems, driving innovation, and transforming organizations*. Columbus, OH: McGraw Hill.

Author information

Lena Skvagerson is an internationally recognized knit and crochet designer originally from Sweden and now based in California. For more than four decades she has created commercially successful patterns for yarn companies, publishers, and craft magazines, with a focus on designs that combine engaging stitch patterns with approachable construction. Her work spans garments, accessories, and large-scale blanket projects that guide makers through enjoyable, skill-building techniques. Lena continues to develop new designs and educational content for the global knitting and crochet community, including recent blanket collaborations with craft publisher Annie's Attic.

Pechacek & Skvagerson: Artists' Statement

Dr. Judith Pechacek DNP, RN, CENP, is a Distinguished Professor and holder of the Katherine R. & C. Walton Lillehei Chair in Nursing Leadership at the University of Minnesota, School of Nursing. Her teaching responsibilities include courses in leadership, quality, business and global studies. Her scholarship is dedicated to interprofessional practice and the connection to organizational culture and quality patient outcomes. Dr. Pechacek is a Senior Quality Scholar, faculty member for the Veterans Administration Quality Scholars Fellowship program.

As far as knitting goes Judy is a “new knitter” and found the support from Lena’s pattern, videos and encouragement as the key to her success in knitting her first blanket.

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