

Letter from the Editor

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It is a privilege to assume the editorship of the *Journal of College Orientation, Transition, and Retention* (JCOTR). As the flagship scholarly publication for NODA, Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education, this journal occupies a critical position in the academic landscape. This transition in leadership provides an opportunity for an intentional evolution of the journal's focus, ensuring that our scholarly output remains aligned with the complex theoretical and operational challenges currently facing higher education.

Colleges and universities are navigating a period characterized by heightened scrutiny regarding the cost, relevance, and measurable outcomes of degree programs. Institutional leaders are increasingly required to provide empirical evidence of the efficacy of their student success initiatives. Within this climate of fiscal and public accountability, the functions of orientation, transition, and retention (OT&R) need to move from the periphery to the center of institutional strategy.

However, for OT&R to be recognized as a core component of the academic mission, we must be supported by a robust body of peer-reviewed research. It is no longer sufficient for practitioners to rely on anecdotal evidence or traditional “best practices.” The current landscape demands evidence-based, proven frameworks that demonstrate how specific, intentional interventions contribute to institutional persistence and student integration. JCOTR is committed to serving as the venue for this scholarly discourse.

A primary objective of my editorial tenure will be to advance a more sophisticated understanding of the student transition. Central to this is the concept of a “seamless transition”—a theoretical and operational framework that views the student journey as a continuous, uninterrupted narrative rather than a series of disconnected administrative events. Historically, higher education structures have fragmented the student experience into silos: recruitment, orientation, and academic integration. This fragmentation often creates gaps between institutional touchpoints where students are most vulnerable to attrition. Scholarly inquiry must therefore shift toward examining onboarding as a systematic longitudinal process. This requires moving beyond transactional models of matriculation to explore what influences a student's sense of belonging and development of their self-identity from the point of admission through the first year and beyond. By focusing on the structural and pedagogical design of these transitions, OT&R researchers provide the theoretical scaffolding necessary to bridge these gaps and secure long-term retention.

We have a collective responsibility to increase the depth and rigor of our research, which will heighten the profile and impact of the OT&R profession. The OT&R field offers a unique environment for the study of student development, identity formation, and institutional change. We must leverage this by subjecting our programs and policies to meaningful and rigorous analysis.

My goal for JCOTR is to help facilitate the profession's movement from program management to knowledge generation. We encourage faculty, graduate students, and scholar-practitioners to submit manuscripts that employ diverse methodologies—ranging from longitudinal quantitative analyses of retention trends to critical qualitative inquiries into the experiences of unique student populations. By documenting and analyzing our work, we can validate OT&R as a rigorous field of study and provide campus leaders with the intellectual tools necessary to navigate the political and operational realities of student success.

As we look forward, JCOTR will continue to prioritize work that explores the intersections of theory and practice. We are refining our internal structures and review processes to ensure the timely publication of high-quality scholarship that meets the evolving needs of our readers.

I would like to express my appreciation to Lisa Dela Cruz, my NODA partner and Director of Education, and the NODA leadership for their support and collaboration during this transition. I also thank the new and returning members of the JCOTR Editorial Review Board for their continued commitment to the scholarly integrity of this publication. I look forward to working with each of you to advance the scholarship of our profession and enhance the success of the students we serve.

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