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Welcome Message & Notes from Richard Florida

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MANAGING EDITOR'S MESSAGE
Vass Bednar

There are a lot of academic Journals out there. You may be wondering - why should we have, and do we really need another one? Or alternatively, since when did academic publications grow out of the not-for-profit sector? Most of all, I hope that you are musing about how you can best play a role in enhancing the study of hunger and poverty in our communities.

The Journal of Hunger and Poverty is not quite like other Journals. As an online, student-led, and peer reviewed academic Journal, we are challenging the notion of what a Journal is, or can be. As part of the Public Knowledge Project[1] we have committed to freely sharing knowledge and ideas through the internet. More than that, we have consciously worked to eliminate as many barriers as possible to both potential publishers and our audience. The result is a truly unique and inventive venture that complements the Ontario Association of Food Bank (OAFB)'s commitment to research and public education.

We're online for two reasons. The obvious one is that we're a not for profit, and it just wouldn't make financial sense for us to go press. A less obvious reason is that we hope to be as accessible as possible to a large and diverse readership. If you can access a computer and the internet, then you are welcome to share in and contribute to the ideas that we publish. You can automatically send a message to the author or a letter to the editor; you can register with us as a Reader, Author, Reviewer, or all of the above. You can browse and cite past articles, and help us improve new ones. You might also contribute art for the next cover page, or set up a special interview and do a feature piece. There are several ways that you can participate, and we hope to embrace as diverse a population as possible as we continue to publish important work on critical socioeconomic problems.

A second defining feature is that we're entirely student led. We rely on the energy and insight of Canadian undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students as they join a lively chorus of voices from academics and community members alike. No contributor will ever be turned down based on their credentials (or lack thereof) – all submissions are

[1] The Public Knowledge Project is a research and development initiative directed toward improving the scholarly and public quality of academic research through the development of innovative online publishing and knowledge-sharing environments.

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judged on the merit of their research and contribution to the conversation about mitigating poverty and protecting our most vulnerable. On top of that, we boast a strong (and growing) team of proficient young volunteers who review and critique Journal submissions. These enthusiastic thinkers also act as advocates at their respective universities and communities, spreading the word about our initiative and informing interested parties. So you might consider the Journal as one gigantic invitation. An invitation to young innovators who are already thinking hard about how to improve society through strategic social programs and education to share their ideas with others who are invested in identical issues in various places.

We intend to both capture and catalyze high quality research from across the province, while also providing the opportunity for students to participate in the peer review process (this includes proofreading, copyediting, layout, and editing. We also want to feature well-written scholastic papers that can do more than just make a grade, but maybe make a difference in a broader sense by informing policy and decision makers.

In preparation for the launch of the Journal, I had the unique privilege to interview the best-selling scholar Richard Florida and learn his thoughts regarding [*the role of the Creative Class and poverty reduction, poverty in the City of Toronto, poverty and place, crime, and some words of advice for young adults*]. Florida is one of the world's leading public intellectuals whose ideas on the "creative class," commercial innovation, and regional development are being used globally to change the way regions and nations do business and transforms their economies.

At first glance, the connection between a famous public intellectual and a small online Journal may not be apparent. But Professor Florida's reflections on his life influences and ideas about creativity and the economic significance of human capital are especially relevant as the Journal of Hunger and Poverty aspires to unite students, professionals, and community members of various ages and with sundry experiences in approaching solutions to political problems. The following is a summary of our conversation.

The Creative Class and Poverty Reduction

Growing up in urban Newark, New Jersey, Richard Florida shared that as he watched the city"s rates of infant mortality, AIDS infections, racial tensions and riots develop over time. He also reminisced how he clearly remembered Presidents Lynden B. Johnson and Robert Kennedy talk about the infamous "War on Poverty." These memories help to establish the public policy context that he was exposed to. Especially notable is the wartime narrative of poverty as something that must be fought - a narrative that remains popular today. Against this background, Florida considered some of "smartest people" to be the kids that he met as a young man. Some were fellow musicians, who were certainly smart, but eventually dropped out of high school for a range of reasons. These friends quickly became part of the "working class or poor," and this fate of theirs eventually sent Richard Florida to the "Why Factory." Because these people were engaging and creative, and just as „smart" as he was, Florida considered their exclusion from higher education and compromised participation in the labour force to be "an issue of moral and social justice." His research establishes the importance of creatively

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engaging workers to support economic prosperity. The kind of person that Florida is describing, someone young and interesting, with great potential and insight, is similar to the contributor that the JHP courts. What barriers are there to the successes of young people? How or do our educational systems privilege the affluent and uniquely exclude or discourage others? Florida observed that these friends "did not seem to fit, or read fast enough, or got bored." Is this a failure of our education systems? What incentives can we create to keep people in high school and support them in pursuing meaningful careers? How do we make education exciting for all young people and prevent brilliance from falling through unfortunate cracks? To what extent may school systems be creativity squelchers?

Poverty and Place

Growing up, Richard Florida"s family lived next door to a chemical engineer, but he reflected that his community was economically mixed, whereas now we tend to be much more spatially characterized (especially in more urban areas). This „big sort" (an idea from Bill Bishop) sees the places we live sorted by things like: scale, ability, money, geography. The result is a much more segregated system. As a result of geographic divisions,[2] the city (for example, Toronto) is inadvertently acting to inhibit the creative talent that it contains. At the same time, poor people are very ambitious, and participation in the informal economy of crime may become attractive to those with little economic opportunity. Florida condensed this choice broadly into, "college or crime." Our challenge is to ensure that we use the vast talents of citizens in productive ways to support more prosperous economies – not the proliferation of crime, drug use, or teen pregnancies. What factors have acted to evolve the economic segregation in our cities and provinces? How are other jurisdictions responding to this reality? What are the long-term implications of such sustained segregation?

Crime

In mentioning a hypothesized choice between college and crime, Florida made the point that crime is always a symptom of a deeper issue - specifically, the lack of an ability to use talent. But it is also the lack of the opportunity to use that talent, and not just the state of economy. What are we doing in our cities to reduce crime and re-direct the talents and potentials of citizens? What are the main drivers of crime rates and how do they relate to poverty and economic inequality? These are other compelling questions that may be interrogated in future issues of the Journal.

Young Readers

In words not unfamiliar to young people establishing their future pathways, Florida definitively shares, "If you don"t love it, then forget it." His closing message for the audience and contributors of the Journal of Hunger and Poverty was the acknowledgement that most people do want to "make a difference," but some people my stop because they are closed out from doing so (this is relatively easy to imagine, despite ideological dedication - consider the temptation of taking a high paying job to pay off your debt after graduation). Contributing to the Journal is one way that you may

[2] "Toronto Divided: A Tale of Three Cities" – check it out at
http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/researchbulletins/RB41Media_Release2.pdf

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sustain your commitment to participating in important political change. He reinforces his sage advice to find what you love and to do it – often, and with passion. One other suggestion he makes is "to do a lot," and to "challenge yourself and engage in different experiences."

Many have expressed a general worry that the recent economic crisis is going to change the world in a fundamental way, but Florida expressed a "hunch" that it could be very positive. Perhaps it will catalyze progressive social programs and spotlight the pervasive inequities. It may actually unite us in the distinctive roles of advocacy and consultation in developing new public policies. From an economic perspective, now, more than ever, is the time to mobilize around the issues of hunger and poverty. For if we (as an economy) want to continue to grow and remain competitive, it's not just our industries that we need be concerned about; but rather a greater realization that we cannot we cannot afford to lose human beings. Florida explains that at the most basic level, there are two kinds of jobs: creative and service. In the service sector, about 45% are food or janitorial, and he is very serious about making these jobs *better*. The result would be a more productive and inclusive labour force. Like Richard Florida, we at the Ontario Association of Food Banks and the Journal of Hunger and poverty believe that meaningful investments in and strategies towards poverty reduction demands the innovation, engagement, and most of all, commitment of all constituents.

To learn more about the Journal, visit our homepage at: www.esurio.ca To learn about Richard Florida and The Martin Prosperity Institute visit: http://martinprosperity.org/