

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Minneapolis, Minnesota, showing a wide river (the Mississippi) flowing through it. In the foreground, a large, curved parking lot is filled with cars. To the right, there are several large, multi-story brick buildings, possibly a university campus. In the background, a dense urban skyline with various skyscrapers is visible under a blue sky with some clouds. A bridge with a red railing spans the river in the middle ground. A barge is visible on the river in the lower left.

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The cover image is aerial view of University of Minnesota East and West Bank campuses and the Mississippi River. Photographer Patrick O’Leary. Image via University of Minnesota.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE SIX

By Patrick Nunnally, Editor

The world of higher education is notoriously siloed. Colleges and universities are divided into departments by discipline, which often contain particular subdisciplines. Crossing these lines is difficult and sometimes perilous. But

the study of rivers and water necessarily crosses disciplines. Scientific study can tell us a lot about water, but not what the meaning of our local river is.



Aerial view of University of Minnesota East and West Bank campuses and the Mississippi River. Photographer Patrick O'Leary. Image via University of Minnesota.

This issue of *Open Rivers* explores higher education programs that contribute to new understandings of rivers. We include perspectives from sciences and engineering, as Barbara Heitkamp's review of the work at the St. Anthony Falls Laboratory demonstrates, and as Nicholas R. Jordan and his colleagues show in their discussion of research on Seven Mile Creek.

There is a lot more happening on campuses across the country though. This issue of *Open Rivers* is distinguished by two articles that we solicited from colleagues at other universities. Bethany Wiggin, the founding director of the Penn Program in the Environmental Humanities, offers a rich description of the kinds of programming, engagement, and exploration that come from a deep encounter with a diverse river stretch like the Lower Schuylkill River in Philadelphia. Across the continent, the Los Angeles River is the subject of Tyler Huxtable's exploration of how a river can be part of the emerging image of even such an "unnatural" city as Los Angeles. Huxtable is part of the staff at UCLA's Laboratory for Environmental Narrative Strategies (LENS).

We ask universities to undertake specific roles in our society. One of these is to push inquiries into difficult subjects, asking hard, inconvenient questions that other organizations aren't necessarily tasked with looking into. Kirsten Delegard and Kevin Ehrman-Solberg take up this challenge with their research into the historical and spatial distribution of racially restrictive covenants in Minneapolis. Their findings, that there seems to be a strong historical correlation between restrictive covenants and park lands associated with water bodies in Minneapolis, is sobering news for people committed to a more inclusive future for our water landscapes.

Sara Axtell speaks directly to the sometimes uneasy alliance between community needs and university perspectives in her reflection on bringing disconnected practices together. Universities have responsibilities to their communities, responsibilities which can be hard to understand, much less fulfill.

Speaking of communities, universities are often the location of artistic or other enriching experiences for community members as well as the campus. Phyllis Messenger's review of the theatrical production, *One River*, in Duluth describes just one aspect of a year-long community-engaged series of programs that gathered dozens of diverse perspectives on the St. Louis River.

Of course, the most visible embodiment of a college or university is its student body. Joe Underhill offers a rich, evocative reflection on a semester-long trip down the Mississippi with a group of students from Augsburg College. Kristen Anderson took a more traditional route to broadening her education: study abroad. Anderson's year in Germany nevertheless broadened her understanding considerably of how communities interact with water.

Issue 6 is broadly diverse, yet quite focused. We think all of the pieces contained here offer a distinctive, provocative, perspective that pushes our thinking forward on issues of place, community, and water. Look for more like this in the months to come. Happy reading!

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About the Author

Patrick Nunnally coordinates the River Life Program in the Institute for Advanced Study at the University of Minnesota. He serves as editor for *Open Rivers* and was one of the lead scholars for the University's John E. Sawyer Seminar, "Making the Mississippi: Formulating New Water Narratives for the 21st Century and Beyond," funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.