

# From the Editors

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## A “Re-Introduction” to Opportunity Matters: Sharing our Research, Practice, and Voice



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Welcome back to the *Opportunity Matters!* After eight years of hiatus, the publication has been taken over by the Research, Evaluation, and Data Use Community of Practice of the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) in collaboration with the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. We have worked tirelessly over the past couple of months to bring back the publication and shift it from an occasional paper series into a full-fledged, open-access, academic and creative journal to be available in digital format twice every year. We are excited to present *Opportunity Matters: Journal of Access and Opportunity in Education* (OMJAOE) and hope that it will serve as an avenue to share our research, practice, and voice.

The *Opportunity Matters* journal will continue the vision set eight years ago by our first editor, Jennifer Engle. The publication had been created to provide a scholarly forum for the discussion and dissemination of research related to educational opportunity programs and the populations that they serve. Engle argued that *Opportunity Matters* would be “the critical juncture in the development of our knowledge base about educational opportunity practice and programs” (The Pell Institute, 2008, p.2). The main goal of the publication was to “help make research more accessible and useful to practitioners in the educational opportunity field” (p.3). While we share the vision and goals of the original editor, we believe that a publication of this nature should not only include high-quality research but also the voices and experiences of the practitioners, the community, the parents, and most importantly, the students. We further agree with Engle that there is a lack of studies on what works to help underrepresented students overcome barriers to their participation in higher education. Yet, we believe that there is much to be learned from the student-side of the equation. We are thus proposing new guidelines for submission and hope that this evolution of *Opportunity Matters* will allow for a more robust

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understanding of what is happening with our students in higher education. The following paragraphs lay out the new framework for the journal.

## OVERVIEW

As mentioned earlier, *Opportunity Matters* will serve as a full-fledged peer-reviewed journal where scholars, practitioners, students, parents, and community leaders involved with educational opportunity programs can share their research, reports, ideas, and creative works. The journal is currently set to be published online twice a year in volume format, once in March and once in September; The Pell Institute will make the content available on their website free of charge. To honor the first iteration of the publication, the journal will begin with “Volume 2,” thus the first official issue of OMJAOE would be coded as: OMJAOE 2(1). Forthcoming journal content may be posted online prior to official publication and between issues on the webpage of the Research, Evaluation, and Data Use Community of Practice of the Council for Opportunity in Education. We hope that this early content will be used to fuel discussions and get more practitioners excited about submitting their work for publication.

This publishing venue is designed to provide a forum for the dissemination of research on educational opportunity programs and the voices of the “at-promise” populations which they serve – low-income, first generation, and racial/ethnic minority college students, as well as students with disabilities and veterans. It is our hope that the manuscripts and creative works published in *Opportunity Matters* will influence educational policy and professional practice by shedding light on the challenges, promise, practice, and effectiveness of educational opportunity programs from the perspective of practitioners and practitioner-scholars, as well as the lived experiences and testimonies of the students, parents, and community leaders served by these programs.

Over time, both these student populations and the programs that serve them have been marginalized in larger mainstream publications. In *Opportunity Matters*, we seek to create a space grounded in the experiences and knowledge-base of practitioners and students *for* practitioners and students. Papers and creative works submitted for publication will be subject to peer-review by the Editorial Board, which will include both scholars and practitioners. We aim to make the journal and its content accessible to everyone involved in matters of access and opportunity in education.

## NEW SUBMISSION CATEGORIES

While the journal will adhere to the academic groundwork upon which it was originally founded, we are expanding the nature of submissions to allow individuals to publish work that may not meet the academic research standard. Specifically, we are primarily interested in pieces that may serve as narratives and/or reflections about the experiences of students in our programs or individuals who have had the opportunity to work with students in educational opportunity programs. We believe that alongside original scholarly work on the issues our students face and how to better position our programs to ensure continued funding, we should also be privy to the actual experiences of the individuals connected to our programs, whether good or bad. Like in evaluation and assessment, it is

important to take the time to study all aspects of a particular program. Even when the results are not what we would have hoped, they allow us to make our programs better and make the changes necessary to do more in the future.

## **Articles**

For those interested in submitting research articles, the following are areas of interest for the journal:

1. The demographic profile and needs of students served by educational opportunity programs, especially targeted populations or subgroups (e.g., immigrant students, out-of-school youth, racial/ethnic minority males, rural students)
2. Factors (e.g., academic, social, economic) that influence college access and success for low-income, first generation college students, as well as, veterans and students with disabilities
3. Programs and practices that improve college attendance and completion rates for underrepresented populations
4. Methods used to evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of educational opportunity programs
5. The impact of federal and state policy on education opportunity and the delivery of services to target populations
6. The process, practice, and benefits (as well as challenges) of developing and sustaining partnerships between school districts and institutions of higher education as they relate to issues of access and opportunity

Submissions in this category would involve rigorous, innovative, and critical scholarship that aligns with the mission of the journal. We welcome all modes of inquiry including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, as well as, conceptual review papers that are integrative and timely.

## **Our Voices**

The “Our Voices” category was designed to showcase the work of scholars, practitioners, community leaders, parents, and students who have important knowledge, research, or tools that may be useful to those interested in issues of access and opportunity. These submissions would primarily entail descriptions, data-driven research reports and case studies, or critical reflections with a theoretical framework. It would also serve to include the communication of evaluation methods or the reporting of strategies that work for individual programs and ways in which these may be applied in other contexts, as well as, letters and reactions to policies/actions, and position papers. Solicited commentaries and interviews with specialists and important figures who have made an impact in the

field or in your local community, as well as the evaluation of materials that may be of importance to other practitioners and students in educational opportunity programs will also be considered. Personal reflections and narratives without a theoretical basis will not be included in this category. We see this category as the section of our journal that allows us to share our practices and report their success, and/or a place to obtain knowledge that may help us better make sense of the issues plaguing our programs and our students.

## **Narratives/Creative Works**

This last category includes both personal narratives and creative works. This is because traditionally speaking, these types of content do not make it onto academic journals. Given the nature of educational opportunity programs, we feel that this is a very important component to the story we have to tell. Like success stories in typical newsletters and reports, these works are beneficial to understanding the climate of our programs, how individuals served and affected by our programs may feel, and the kinds of non-scholarly works that our participants and practitioners produce. Thus, this category will serve to showcase alternative forms of expression from our community, alumni, current students, teachers, parents, practitioners, and/or anyone else involved with educational opportunity programs. These may include, but are not limited to, narratives, confessionals, short stories, artwork, drama, humor, poetry, or other creative work. Submissions that are not narratives or personal reflections should include a short reflection or description of how the work is relevant to the focus of the journal. Submissions will be coded as either Narratives or Creative Works once they are received.

## **VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1**

We are excited to present our first full issue of the new *Opportunity Matters: Journal of Access and Opportunity in Education*; one article is featured in each of the submission categories. In the **Articles** section, Dr. Martin Kelly and colleagues present an analysis of the use of the television show “Mythbusters” as the foundation to a summer Upward Bound Program. They find that using the show to teach students core skills in math and science seems to have positive outcomes for students enrolled in their program in two separate years. In **Our Voices**, Dr. Carmen Veloria reflects on the process of conducting ethnographic research with a young Latina woman. Her piece highlights the dilemmas that arise when we are forced to navigate the fine line between being disconnected enough from our participants to be objective, yet connected enough to be authentic. Finally, Tiffany Martínez recounts her experiences as an activist on her college campus in the **Narratives/Creative Works** category. A McNair Scholar, she provides a narrative on her own personal experiences and how she became one of the three scholars that fought against their university administration to keep their space on campus.

These three articles are great examples of the types of work we are looking to publish in the journal, and encourage you to submit your own work for consideration. We are thankful to all of the reviewers who made this issue possible, and to the editorial board for helping us get everything together in such a short amount of time. We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we have enjoyed putting it together.