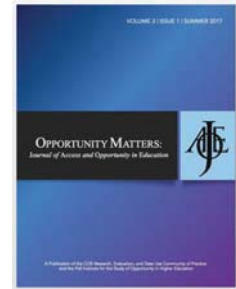


## An Introduction to *Opportunity Matters*, Volume 3, Issue 1



**Abráham E. Peña-Talamantes\*** and **Mika Yamashita\*\***

Welcome practitioners, scholars, students, and supporters to another edition of *Opportunity Matters*! It has been a year since our last volume was published and there have been several changes in the political and educational sphere since then. Without going into detail on what these changes have been and their potential implications on our programs and goals, we will say this: *it is now, more than ever, of utmost importance that we support educational opportunity programs and the populations which they serve.*

With *Opportunity Matters* we hope to create a space where research, knowledge, and voice can be shared among the community. We hope that the content of these volumes can help interested individuals, policy makers, and other professionals better understand the needs, celebrate in the successes, and contribute to scholarly discussion on the lives, experiences, and issues that plague students from marginalized groups and populations with a need for access and opportunity in education.

We maintain that the primary goal of this journal is to help make research, promising practices, and other creative works more accessible and useful to practitioners in the educational opportunity field. There is a lack of studies that target the experiences of underrepresented students and what strategies may work to help them succeed. Similarly, there is a lack of purely reflective pieces that may help shed light on the individualized narratives of underrepresented students, faculty, staff, and other professionals or individuals within or outside of the educational sphere. At *Opportunity Matters*, we welcome many types of scholarly and reflective work. We believe that while it is important to include open-access to peer reviewed, systematic research, there is much value in reflection, art, poetry and other creative works, as well.

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## JOURNAL OVERVIEW AND SUBMISSIONS CATEGORIES

*Opportunity Matters* serves 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. As of 2017, we will be publishing one volume per year at the end of the summer. Each volume will be released prior to the Annual Conference of the Council for Opportunity in Education, where it will be presented during the business meeting of the Research, Evaluation, and Data Use Community of Practice. Authors whose pieces are published in an issue may be asked to speak about their work during the COE session to elaborate on their findings, recommendations, and/or experiences. The journal is made available in PDF format, free-of-charge through the Research, Evaluation, and Data Use Community of Practice website and through a dedicated page within The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education:

[http://www.pellinstitute.org/opportunity\\_matters.shtml](http://www.pellinstitute.org/opportunity_matters.shtml)

The journal accepts submissions in three difference categories: Articles, Our Voices, and Narratives & Creative Works. We have included these three types of submissions because 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. To get a holistic understanding of our programs and our students, we need to understand them from many angles. It is our hope that this structure will help us do just that. The following paragraphs describe each category and some general guidelines for submission.

### 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. This section 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. In other words, a section on “promising practices” for the community.

## **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 allow us to better understand: (a) the climate of our programs; (b) how individuals served and affected by our programs may feel; and (c) 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.

## **VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1**

In the pages that follow you will find three pieces that make up Volume 3, Issue 1 of *Opportunity Matters: Journal of Access and Opportunity in Education*. We thank the authors for their contributions and reflections and hope that the larger educational opportunity programs community will be able to take valuable information from these works.

In the **Articles** section, Waller and Wolfe explore the relationships between faculty mentoring and three types of self-efficacy: academic, research, and social. Using a qualitative approach and two McNair Scholars cohorts, several themes are identified that point to the importance of mentoring and students' perceptions of self-efficacy across these domains. The study argues that mentorship opportunities are instrumental to the development of self-efficacy for low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students; the authors provide some recommendations for McNair hosting institutions to take advantage of these findings.

In **Our Voices**, Kaplan and Potvin speak about their experiences working with students in an educational opportunity program. They posit that using participatory research methods and allowing students to have a voice in the development and implementation of educational opportunity programs can make a major impact in the students' success. Given the program they examine is within the engineering field, their recommendations speak to both institutions and researchers about ways in which programming and frameworks can best support marginalized student populations. They hope that future work may speak to issues of retention and student experience for underrepresented student populations in higher education.

In the final section, **Narratives & Creative Works**, Hogan reflects on her journey through the STEM field as a first-generation, low-income, female in chemistry and engineering. An important and timely piece, this narrative captures the inner struggle that many of our students face when entering the natural and physical sciences. It speaks to the power of persistence as the key to changing the face of STEM, from a white-male dominated field to a more inclusive and open one with diversity of thought and experiences. Hogan reminds us that our actions today are instrumental in carving out a path for others like ourselves in the years to come.

These articles allow us to better understand the needs of our students and help us understand how we can be more intentional about creating spaces that are inclusive and supportive. Whether it is by listening to their experiences, pushing them to persist through the challenging times, or allowing them to connect to others with similar experience on campus, there are many ways in which we can help our students and colleagues navigate the college experience and reach their goals. Thank you, again, to all the reviewers, authors, supporters, and editorial board members for your time, feedback, and revisions that made *Volume 3* possible. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Opportunity Matters*, and encourage others to submit their work.