We dedicate this third edition of the To Be the Best You Can Be to Ms. Lesley Tyson. Lesley, as she is known among staff and students, has provided an invaluable amount of time and service to the College Opportunities Program over the past six years. Ms. Tyson has served as our volunteer Editor-In-Chief and has produced quarterly newsletters and three editions of the To Be The Best You Can Be.

For her dedication, commitment and service to COP, we extend our warmest Mahalo for all that she has done for us and for also producing another fine copy of the booklet, which you are about to encounter.

With love and gratitude,
The COP Staff
Introduction

To Be the Best You Can Be III contains reflections from University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) alumni who gained entry into the university via the College Opportunities Program (COP). The COP, which has been a state-funded program since 1970, has continued to fulfill its mission of recruiting, screening, selecting, and preparing Hawai‘i residents for a successful first-year at the UHM. COP believes that given a chance, individuals who are motivated and provided with new learning opportunities and support services can succeed in their first year at the University and eventually earn a baccalaureate degree. This booklet provides a glimpse in the lives of individuals who were given a chance to attend the university and took full advantage of the opportunity. Although To Be the Best You Can Be III highlights the lives of a few, their stories reflect the lives of many other UHM alumni who also experienced COP and succeeded.

As you read through the academic and personal successes contained herein, keep in mind that they are written by individuals who were initially refused admission to UHM for a variety of reasons. Had the chance to attend COP not been given to these individuals, we can only imagine how different their lives would have been today. As you go through in life and come across situations where you are faced with offering someone a second chance, remember these stories. You just might change that person’s life. Enjoy!
Call me an idealist, I was a young man from the Big Island, graduating high school, who knew what I wanted, where I wanted to go, only dilemma though, was how I was going to get it. The latter was attaining what many post grads desire, a higher education, typically, a Baccalaureate Degree. It was such a significant time, a point in our lives when we go through a major transition from teenage to adulthood and eventually our future. After deciding that UHM was my college of choice, I submitted my application for admission. Pending a response, I learned the existence of the College Opportunities Program through my high school counselor so I opt for applying as my “plan B.” Although I later received an acceptance letter, I was still fortunate to join the program.

It’s been virtually 12 years ago in the summer of ‘96, I can recall a very wise man state, “this summer you will prove yourselves and become eligible UHM freshman.” That was the first time we were introduced to Bill Chambers, then director of COP. COP is literally an opportunity program and it proves that given a chance there is hope for students who otherwise thought a college degree was unfeasible. The program allowed me to separate from my comfort zone and apply myself realizing a potential that is boundless. With the skills, knowledge and summer experience gained through the program with classes like college success, college techniques and writing workshop, I was so confident in not only surviving my freshman year but I was optimistically looking forward for a successful college career. I felt in the forefront, like a seasoned veteran, for as a freshman entering the fall semester, I already had 3 UHM credits by taking History 152. I was also familiarized with the campus and on-campus resources available; my class schedule was set; I experienced dorm life and independency being away from home, in addition I had the support of the COP staff as part 2 of the program. I’ve also come to realize of other snippets such as how having a loud alarm clock was a necessity, to always have a few rolls of quarters stashed for laundry, memorizing my SS# and city bus times/routes, menus of take-out eateries and that saimin and cup of noodles was a staple food that’s good for breakfast, lunch and/or dinner. The program not only built a foundation for college entry, but another aspect was having a supportive network of friends as different cohorts of diverse students from Hawai‘i high schools were formed. I have become so close with those I befriended that a handful of us still keep in touch to this day even though we’re
all located far apart. In fact we plan on reuniting this October in Vegas (Gina, keep in touch!).

It was a tremendous sense of accomplishment and boost of confidence knowing that by applying what I’ve gained, I would succeed. In spring 2002, I became the first in my family to complete and earn a college degree. I graduated with a Bachelor’s of Science degree in nursing and currently work full-time as an Emergency Room charge nurse which is my passion. On a part-time basis, I work in a family health center with nurse practitioners and doctors as well as assist in conducting diabetes research in conjunction with the Mayo Clinic. I am also a Hawai‘i division steward of bargaining unit 9 for HGEA, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO. Till this day I still utilize skills I adopted from COP while at work and life in general such as prioritization, efficient time management and setting realistic personal goals in the short and long term.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt mahalo to the awesome 1996 COP staff of Bill Chambers, Gina Maesaka, Sherill Tomita, Lesley Tyson, JoAnn Oshiro and Kiaka Gaughen. Thank you for your undying support, guidance and positive spirit. May COP continue to be state funded and persist in providing the opportunity to minority and nontraditional Hawai‘i students state-wide in building that critical foundation that has made many of us alumni successful in life. I can attest that because of this program and special group of dedicated and competent individuals, I became the best I could be.
Growing up, my parents always emphasized education and getting a degree. Education was especially important for my family as no one had ever attended or graduated from a university. As my senior year in high school approached everyone around me began to buzz about attending college. However, coming from a family with no opportunity experiencing college, I had no idea what I was going to do or how I was going to go about it. Luckily, having had friends and counselors to guide me, I was introduced to the College Opportunities Program, which at first I thought was not for me. I didn’t consider myself to be at risk; in fact, I think I did quite well in high school. However, as I continued to research the program, I needed it to prepare and teach me about college. Little did I know that the program would affect my life tremendously. After having been accepted into the program, I felt scared and overwhelmed. I was about to start the summer program, which meant being away from my family and working with a bunch of people I didn’t know. On the first day of the program all my fears were calmed as the staff and students in the program were welcoming. The students had the same anxieties as I did about making the transition to college smooth and we were able to relate and help each other through. As I look back on my experiences in COP, I can honestly say that COP provided me with everything that I needed to survive in college and beyond. The program and its staff not only helped me get into college, but they gave me the skills and encouragement to make it through. The endless support and genuine care they have for their students is something I am grateful for and will always cherish. This program made a difference in my life and I thank everyone at COP for helping me every step of the way. I would like to give special thanks to Bill Chambers, Sherril Tomita, Gina Maesaka and Mike Maglaya for believing in me and helping me to be the best I can be. Mahalo!
Born and raised in Waialua on the North Shore of O‘ahu, I graduated from Leilehua High School in 2002 and entered the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa through the College Opportunities Program. While growing up I always had the ambition to get a higher education, however my SAT scores and financial funds proved to be menacing obstacles preventing me from entering a four year university. So with the help of my college career counselor, Lauren Shimizu, I pursued another alternative called the College Opportunities Program.

Like many students who came through the College Opportunities Program, I came from a broken home where I lived poor and relied on a central network of close friends and my hānai family members to get through life. The College Opportunities Program became my new support system at the college level. I created friendships with people from all over the state of Hawai‘i and till this day I can truly say I’ve gained new brothers and sisters. The full-time staff support of the counselors, Gina Maesaka and Mike Maglaya, pushed me to pursue a double major in Information and Computer Science and Hawaiian Language.

It took me four and a half years to complete my double major. During those years I stressed over grades lower than a B, stayed up till 3 a.m. to write computer programs, came in on weekends to see my Kumu for help, cried to my counselor Gina Maesaka about passing classes, and worked part-time at Student Housing as an IT specialist, just to make that extra cash. Finishing college became the ultimate challenge for me. In order to keep myself motivated I always thought about the opportunity I was given to enter college. I thought about all the applicants who didn’t get into the College Opportunities Program. Deep in my heart I knew that for every student who passed COP in 2002 there were three other applicants who missed out on the opportunity to enter college. I thought about all those students who would have killed to be in my shoes. I also thought about my family, school and community that I represented. As the semesters flew by, I made a lot of sacrifices to stay in college and as a result more doors of opportunity opened for me.

During my junior year in college I wanted to do an internship that would help me gain real work experience so that once I graduated from the university I could readily get a job. A classmate in my Information and
Computer Science class told me about an internship for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). I decided to get more information at the Student Employment and Cooperative Education (SECE) office. So there I stood a 5’2” local girl with long curly black hair, halter top, shorts, CD player in hand and green flowered back-pack. Once I told the counselor of my ambition to pursue an internship with the FBI, she quickly told me that it was a very competitive program that only accepted students in the top 12 percent of their class. She also mentioned that they only take one or no student from UH Mānoa and furthermore advised me to seek other internships. After the negative conversation I ran up to the COP office and vented my anger to Gina and Mike. I felt judged by my appearance and my academic accomplishments and my abilities were overlooked. At that time I made a promise to myself that a country girl from Waialua can compete for a national internship. In the summer of 2006 I was fortunate enough to participate in the FBI Honors Internship Program. I was selected to be one of 132 individuals selected across the nation from over 10,000 applicants. I represented Hawai’i in the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division in Clarksburg, West Virginia. My specific assignment was to work with the network team in the Technology Integration Support Unit (TISU).

Since I came back to the Islands I’ve grown both personally and professionally. Each day I challenge myself by encouraging local students to go beyond Hawai’i and explore all the opportunities out there. As a result, I’m working under the College Opportunities Program as the High School Coordinator for a Native Hawaiian grant called Manawa Kūpono. So to those who are reading this book I challenge you to be the best that you can be and continue to inspire other minorities to carry on the values of “Hard Work,” “Dedication” and “Commitment.”
I have come full circle in my life and I have COP to thank for that. I was denied regular admission at UHM and still remember rather painfully receiving the denial letter in the mail. I was an ambitious high school student driven to start my college career so much so that I attended summer school every year so that I could graduate a year early. There was no question of my motivation and commitment to attend college but rather what was evident was my lack of college preparation and understanding the rigors of academic life.

I am from the leeward side of O‘ahu and a graduate of Campbell High School. For me going to UHM on the other side of the island was a distant dream. A closer and more tangible goal was to go to Leeward Community College but I had bigger dreams: I wanted to get my Bachelor’s degree and attend law school. But even as I began to believe in that dream, I was denied admission to UHM based on my standardized test scores.

COP saw more in me than just test scores. They saw a student who although fell short of the cut-off score, had the motivation and desire to earn a Bachelor’s degree. At sixteen, I entered the COP program and eventually gained regular admission into UHM and ultimately, graduated from UHM with honors in Fall 2000. COP not only provided me a chance to fulfill my educational goals but also to realize my true calling of continuing that legacy by becoming an educator.

After graduating with a bachelor’s degree, I went on to receive a Master’s degree in Educational Psychology with a minor in Counseling and Guidance from the University of Arizona. While there, I was a counselor/academic advisor for low-income, first-generation students and taught a learning strategies course to further assist them with transitioning into the college environment. I was also fortunate to go to Washington D.C. to advocate for funding for programs that assist historically under-represented and disadvantaged college students.

Along the way, I worked as a counselor at a community college helping inner city high school students in Hartford, CT attain a college degree and
worked at a private university in San Jose, CA assisting graduate students in Education and Counseling Psychology. I am currently completing my PhD in Educational Psychology. If someone was to tell me one day I would even be able to say that, I would have thought it was a joke. I have reached and far exceeded my initial educational aspirations and it all started with COP.

If there is one single aspect that has left an indelible mark on me, it is the notion of not underestimating some fundamental human attributes: motivation, perseverance and commitment. If you combine this with the importance of interdependence which is highly regarded in our local culture, you have guaranteed success in every aspect of the word. That is what COP is: it believes in a student’s potential, provides the subsequent avenue yet understands to provide a support system that builds cohesion. I will always be indebted to the staff and a strong advocate for this program.
Kiaka Gaughen
Behavioral Health Specialist, Honokaa High School, Department of Education, Kamuela, HI
Founder, www.recruitmetoo.com

COP 1985
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, BA in Geography 1991, MEd in Counseling 1994

From a very early age I decided I would attend college. I knew it was not going to be easy because I had a difficult time reading and writing. I was in the special education programs in both elementary and high school. As a senior I applied to the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, but was declined entry. My SAT scores were too low. That letter really crushed my spirits, but a college counselor in high school told me about the College Opportunities Program. COP accepted me and thus began my college career.

After successfully completing the COP Summer Program I was given entry to the university and an opportunity to prove I had what it took to be a college graduate. After five years at UH I received my bachelor’s degree in Geography and three years later I received my masters degree in Counseling. I even began a doctorates program at the next year. The College Opportunities Program also allowed me to learn that a disability is what made reading and writing difficult. While at UH I was diagnosed with dyslexia. With a few extra learning tips I was able to achieve my goals.

I became a Behavioral Health Specialist in the Kahuuku Complex helping students achieve their dreams. I was also the Associate Pastor in Hope Chapel in Koolauloa and I operate a website called “Recruit Me Too.” My program assists student athletes in finding colleges that will give them opportunities to achieve both academic and athletic careers. In 2008 I moved to Kamuela where I now work at Honokaa High School.

I would like personally to thank all of the past COP staff and the University of Hawai‘i administration for providing me the support and the opportunity to improve my life. Education is the key to success and I am forever grateful for the chance I was given.
Like many of my peers, my parents immigrated to Hawai‘i from the Philippines and worked in the sugar and pineapple fields. “Agbasaka balasangko, get an education,” my father would say with great importance, “so that you don’t have to work hard labor under the sun!” The value of an education has been ingrained in my brother and me since we can remember and we were expected to graduate high school and get a college degree. Like the generation before us we were entering the proverbial uncharted waters. Instead of seeking jobs in a new country, we were in pursuit of higher education.

I had outstanding grades in high school and I knew getting accepted into the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa would be the easy part. I was more concerned with knowing where to go and how things were done. The Filipino club advisor at my high school encouraged me to apply to COP, but I heard people say that COP is only for people who cannot get into UH Mānoa. Through my own investigation, this is a misconception. It is not the only criteria on which COP selects participants. COP selects candidates who are positive role models in communities underrepresented and also those who are in need of a structured college entry. My Filipino club advisor knew the types of individuals the program recruited and she thought I had a chance of being part of the program.
Little did I know how much of an impact COP would have during my college experience. It was great! I had 3 credits under my belt, I learned where most of the buildings were located, I learned how to use the library system, I mastered how to register for classes, and I knew what classes to take to have a balanced schedule. I made a lot of friends and met women with similar backgrounds. We had a great time studying and hanging out. When I needed help the COP office was there. A year after completing the COP program, my father unexpectedly passed away. Gina, my COP counselor, was there to help me through the ordeal. It was a relief to know that someone was there for me. I am elated to say that I graduated with a bachelors and masters degree in Accounting from the University of Hawai‘i of Mānoa and am currently a Certified Public Accountant.

Now that I have navigated through the UH system, I am often approached by family members and friends who have graduated high school and looking forward to college. They often ask for advice and this is what I tell them, “You can do it! Believe in yourself! Like anything else in life, you need to work for what you want and take advantage of opportunities as they arrive.”

I am blessed and thankful for the opportunity of participating in COP.
Lawton Mauai

Loss Prevention Manager, Marriott’s Ko Olina Beach Club

COP 1992
Bachelors of Arts in Ethnic Studies (UH Mānoa)
Diploma of Theology (Kanana Fou Theological Seminary in Tafuna, American Samoa)

College was to me a rebirth of perspective and COP was the delivery room. As I came through the six-week passage that magical summer of 1992, it was apparent that the world would never be the same again…and it hasn’t!!!! Arriving twenty minutes late to the first meeting, I was so embarrassed to come out of my mom’s 1990 Ford Aerostar XLT. (Probably the only one in the world made with a five speed stick shift) I was certain that the crowd that I was approaching in front of Hale Kahawai heard all the Samoan obscenities my mom was screaming at me. As time would pass, one of the brothers I made in COP named K.C Kawa’a would later tell me that he remembered me looking pissed off that day. I remember feeling like it was the scene out of the Beverly Hillbillies. No one else had five sisters insisting that they make their bed and set up their room. Me leaving for college symbolized the first bird venturing from the nest. I can still remember the look on my room-mate’s face as he saw enough canned food to feed a small village being stocked into our closet. Even though I lived on the same island when that embarrassing van drove off, it took the old me with it.
No matter how homesick I felt, it was made abundantly clear to me by whole extended family just how disappointed my grandfather was when two of his own sons returned home from college without graduating. Not one of his 11 children and 45 grand children had gone to college so for me that meant that failure was NOT an option. I never had the nerve to tell him that I squandered away my chances at an athletic scholarship by making bad choices before the SAT testing days. For me at this level to say that COP was a second chance was a gross understatement. It represented my last chance to keep the honor of my family intact. Eventually, graduating with my degree granted a certain degree of validation to dream of my grandfather who left American Samoa over 40 years before in search of a better life for his children. Who knew that I would find a new family in the friends that I made that summer.

COP 92 was the clique that took care of each other. (What’s Up Six Pack!) To this day many of them have become my family and our children call each other cousins. As these friends read my words in this piece I proudly say that because they let me be their big brother, their protector, in no small way it fulfilled a maturity in me that I carry with me today. I wonder if those who granted the funds to create the COP program appreciate how they changed not just the lives of the individuals they helped into college but the families that these students have inspired throughout the years. By seeing one of their own succeed, a college degree is now attainable and not an impossible dream. I don’t know if it is possible to give voice to all the dreams and goals that have come to pass because of this program. The program provided the environment for a group of students to form a bond and a support system that we could depend on to get us through those formative years. By giving us the tools to cope with the challenges not just in classes but also the social issues, we were made ready for college life. Coupled with the education resources that COP provided, it also gave us the opportunity to realize our roles within our group. My role was to make sure that everyone was taken care of. This role turned into a career for me.

Today, as the Loss Prevention Manager of the Marriott’s Ko Olina Beach Club, my primary responsibility is assuring the safety and security of both guests and employees. I was very fortunate to find a company whose business ethics are aligned with my personal beliefs. It is the Marriott philosophy to “Take care of the associates and they will take care of the guests who will in turn take care of the bottom line.” All my safety programs and security initiatives are heavily designed around our capacity to care. To learn that there is a quantifiable advantage to conducting business with these values is incredibly reassuring. Looking back, I am truly thankful to everyone involved in the College Opportunities Program for their vision, support and commitment to the education of those of us who would have otherwise not had the chance to realize our dreams. Faafetai Lava!
“Howzit!” Wow, can’t believe how time flies…it’s been 12 years since the end of my college career at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa – College Opportunities Program (COP)…boy do I sure still miss it! The real stepping stone in my life was graduating from UHM with a BA in Zoology back in 2002. I owe it all to the staff at COP (Bill, Sherril, Gina, Lesley and Joann) and, of course, my parents who instilled in me the importance of education.

It’s been a hard road to get to where I am today. Growing up in Nā‘ālehu, Ka‘u (on Hawai‘i Island) has been amazing, but it was difficult as well. Both of my parents worked for Ka‘u Agribusiness, my mother for the macadamian nut section, while my father spent most days hauling sugar cane from the fields to the factory. During the summer before my senior year at Ka‘u High, rumors arose about the closing of the sugar plantation…it struck reality as I walked down the aisle to receive my high school diploma. The Ka‘u sugar plantation closed in 1996…my father lost his job. It was devastating to all the residents of Ka‘u, including my family…how were my parents going to support me for school?

The one thing I always had in me was the goal-oriented mind set (which I still have today, of course!). I was not going to let anything get in the way of me pursuing a college degree—including my father losing his job. Being accepted into COP was surely a benefit – as it helped students who are not only economically disadvantaged, like myself, but who are academically under-prepared as well...WHAT A GREAT PROGRAM!

After graduating from UHM I moved back to my hometown of Nā‘ālehu. I have been very fortunate to have held two jobs in conservation biology in the district of Ka‘u. The first was as Wildlife Research Supervisor for the Hawksbill Turtle Recovery Program and now with the Nature Conservancy as a Natural Resource Manager. My job entails coordinating and implementing the biological activities within our Preserve, which includes invasive species, rare plant and bird surveys. I absolutely love my job!

Much mahalo goes to the COP staff during my years at UHM. They have looked out for me, supported me and gave me that extra push when I needed it most...taking organic chemistry—haha! Being in COP was an integral part of my life—they were part of want I am today. To the next generation of COPers: When life hands you a bunch of lemons…make choke lemonade and share ‘um with me!

Aloha!

Eldridge E. Naboa
Natural Resource Manager, The Nature Conservancy-Hawai‘i Island Program

COP 1996
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, BA in Zoology 2002
In May of 2006, I graduated with a B.B.A. in Business Marketing from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. On that day, I witnessed how the connotation and importance of graduating from a university varies amongst everyone. Some people high fived their way on to the stage as fog horns rang through Stan Sheriff to receive their diploma, while others looked as though the whole entire moment was moving way too fast, causing them to slow down a pace or two just to make time imitate. Everyone took in the situation differently, but we were all there for the same reason, as if in unison, to receive our “golden ticket.” Nevertheless the way we got here, differentiated all of us.

My college path started on the first day I stepped onto the UHM campus as a College Opportunities Program student living in Johnson Hall and taking summer courses to prep me for my freshman year. I was advised from my Mililani High school counselors and family members that this program would certainly be a great opportunity. Though I had earned regular admittance to the University, I had made a decision that this program would be important to my college career and chose to enroll as a COP student. The COP summer program allowed me to meet new people, many who are still close friends with me today. I also had the opportunity to become familiarized with the campus and its resources, which helped me pass the summer program and awarded me admission to UH Mānoa as a freshman.

In my freshman year, I was encouraged by my COP counselors to become an active student on campus, so I joined the Campus Center Board, a student governing entity of the UH Mānoa Campus Center. Becoming a member of this Board provided me the experience of leadership, policy making, and the opportunity to voice the opinions and concerns of fellow classmates. As a graduate student, I am still an active member of the Board and enjoy the process of enhancing student life on the UH Mānoa campus.

Throughout my college career, COP continually opened doors for me. During a COP seminar we were introduced to the Regents and Presidential Scholars program. I had become particularly interested with the program. With continuous aid from COP and efforts in my college studies, I was awarded a Presidential Scholar. Becoming a Presidential Scholar provided me
with tuition waivers for my remaining years of my degree and a travel grant which I used to study for a semester in Paris, France. I studied at the prestigious Université de Paris Sorbonne, attended classes in Louvre Museum, learned the beautiful language, and was able to backpack through 6 neighboring countries. Without COP’s guidance and introduction to programs such as these, my college experience would have been dull and would have narrowed my chances of graduating from UH Mānoa in 4 years which was a personal goal of mine.

Today I am currently working towards a recently set goal in my life, my master’s degree, while working a full-time job with the College Opportunities Program as the Manawa Kūpono College Program Coordinator and COP counselor. As I work with new incoming COP students, I am able to give back to the program that provided me with a great college experience. Now it is my chance to do the same for the students as what my COP counselors had provided me, and guide the students towards their very important day when they graduate and receive their very own “golden ticket”.
Bryan M. Yucoco
Account Executive/Manager, Exotic Woodlines/Pictures Plus, Kapolei, HI

COP 1991
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, BA Psychology 1996
University of Phoenix, Honolulu Campus MBA E-Commerce 2002

My parent immigrated to the U.S. from the Philippines, my father was enlisted in the Coast Guard and was out to sea about three quarters of the year, my mother barely spoke English and raised my sister and I. My parents always emphasized education “is the key to advancement.” While going to school on the mainland, I was a very good student and was involved with after school activities. I then moved to Hawai‘i and caught the “Surfing” bug. Academics took a second seat to the ocean and everything I did from that point on was surf related.

Fast forward to my senior year in high school, I had done pretty well in my SAT’s and had taken the college prep courses but my GPA was not up to par. I wanted to go to college but didn’t really think about it till it was too late. The school counselor implied that college wasn’t for me. Though I was discouraged by my counselor, I had applied to UH Mānoa; it never hurts to try, what’s the worst that can happen. I had the fortunate luck to have heard about the COP Program through a friend and submitted my application. I figured it would be a good back up in the event I couldn’t get in. Several weeks later I had received a rejection letter from UH. Needless to say, I was not too surprised. I later had the fortunate luck to have been accepted into the COP Program.

The summer program was an eye opener for me. I learned how to manage my time, work effectively with others, set goals and implement a plan for success. That summer went by quickly and so did the following 5 years. I had always dreamed about graduating from college, I knew I could do it. What
really hit home was seeing my parent’s joy and happiness that I was about to receive a college degree. My mother mentioned that she always prayed and hoped that I would graduate but she had her doubts.

I have my UH diploma and my rejection letter framed together to remind me that you can achieve your goals no matter what anybody says. All you have to do is believe in yourself and plan to succeed. A few years after graduating, I got the education bug again and started graduate school. I was also working a full time job but twenty eight months later, I was adding another degree to my credentials. It was a tough and long road but the lessons learned in the summer of 1991 gave me the tools and the attitude to make it happen.

COP has given me very found memories, life long friends, and the tools to succeed in life. Mahalo for the support through the years and without this program, I wouldn’t be the person I am today.
I’m the youngest of twelve children and a first generation immigrant. I am also a first-generation student. In high school I did not know a whole lot about the college process. I didn’t think that college was a possibility due to financial constraints and a lack of preparation until I heard about the College Opportunities Program (COP).

I got excited when I heard that there was an opportunity for me to attend college despite my financial status and a lack of college preparedness. Someone told me that the key to enter the program is a “strong desire for success.” I knew I met this requirement 101% so, I applied.

I was selected as an “alternate”. As an alternate I knew that my chance of getting selected was very slim but I waited patiently. With fervent prayers and a stroke of good luck, I eventually got chosen to be a COP participant. I was grateful! I accepted it with enthusiasm and entered the program in 1995. The summer program was an intensive college experience filled with lots of learning outcomes in academics, time management, personal finance and personal choices. The experience taught me to become independent. One of the requirements was to dorm. It thrilled me to think that I could start making decisions all on my own; to decide when to wake up, who to hang out with and how to spend my time. I enjoyed every bit of it but along with the excitement, reality kicked in. I began to feel home sick; had to make daily decisions whether to go out with friends or read the assigned chapters on my syllabus; realized that the stipend I received wasn’t enough to survive so decisions had to be made whether to spend my last penny on lunch or as entrance to Blue Zebra. Decisions, decisions, decisions. With a little bit of
fun and a lot of hard work, I think I managed to make the right choices. I passed the summer program and was even recognized for receiving the highest points at the end. It was a rewarding summer experience.

Along with the challenges there were countless memories to smile about: the opportunity to meet great counselors like Gina, Sherril, and Bill; listening to COP Alumni guest speakers who were very inspirational; attending History 152 lectures and learning from one of the finest professors, Mr. Fujita; and most importantly, learning to make important decisions that would make or break my opportunities for success. I now have something to smile about because I learned to choose the right path with great guidance from Gina, Sherril, and Bill. I completed my Bachelor’s degree in December 1999 with Distinction. Not bad of an accomplishment for a first generation student!

I have been working for UHM in the offices of School and College Services and Admissions and Records. I was an Admissions Counselor (recruiter) for seven years and recently transitioned to a new position as an Admissions Officer. I am also beginning a part-time career with the FBI as a Contract Linguist. These career opportunities have been possible for me because of the educational foundation I received from UHM and the strong support I received from the COP staff.

I can not express how thankful I am for the opportunity that UHM has provided me through the COP program! My overall experience both as a student and as a working professional have been extraordinary. I gained great confidence and public relation skills, traveled to different places in U.S. and Asia, and met many wonderful people, some of whom are now lifetime friends. Speaking of lifetime friends...

My success at UH Mānoa COP program came in a package. Not only did I obtain a great academic experience but I also met my COP best friend, Stephanie, who later introduced me to my husband. Through COP I also gained a lifetime friendship and a lifetime partner! I’ve been married to my husband, John, for five years now. We have an adorable daughter, Sarra, who just turned three (December 2008).

I never thought that higher education was a possibility for me but COP offered me the opportunity to reach a height of success I never thought possible! I encourage you to take the challenge. COP is there to help you be the best you can be!
COP is interested in hearing from the rest of the ‘ohana.

Please contact us.
We look forward to hearing from you.

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