To Be The Best
You Can Be II

College Opportunities Program
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
To Be the Best You Can Be II is a collection of reflections written by a group of University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa graduates who entered the university through the College Opportunities Program (COP). This booklet is a follow up to the original, created by COP through its Minority Student Retention Service in 1995. We have been fortunate to have the same enthusiastic participation in 2003 by our alumni, many of whom have successfully completed their education and have gone far beyond their early dreams and expectations. The academic and personal successes of these former students are especially significant in view of the fact that many of them were initially refused admission to UH Mānoa for a variety of reasons.

The College Opportunities Program began in 1970 at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa as part of a national Model Cities Project funded by the federal government. In 1973 the Hawai‘i State Legislature authorized general funds for COP to recruit, screen, select and prepare Hawai‘i residents statewide for a “summer and first-year residential college experience” on the Mānoa campus. COP expanded in 1990 selecting 125 Hawai‘i residents who were denied regular Mānoa admission, disadvantaged, ethnically underrepresented on campus, nontraditional, or in need of a structured residential college-entry experience. Selected students are committed, entering first-year undergraduates with academic potential and a desire to earn a baccalaureate degree.

In the past several years COP has undergone a number of significant changes: long-time director Bill Chambers retired, as did secretary JoAnn Oshiro. Minority Student Retention Service Coordinator Lesley Tyson also retired and counselor Sherril Tomita is now at Arizona State University. Even with all the changes COP has continued to provide quality services to its students with the dedicated staff of Acting Director Gina Tsuzuki, Counselor Mike Maglaya and Graduate Assistant Rhea Gomez (COP ’97).

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Cover drawing by David Keola, COP 1983
Administrative Officer, School of Ocean & Earth Sciences & Technology
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, BBA, 1989

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Some 30 years have passed since I participated in the College Opportunities Program in 1972. I have always held a warm and special place in my heart for COP. I recall with fondness that wonderful time in my life that was full of challenges and immense personal growth. It is an honor for me to share with you some of my thoughts and feelings about COP.

Perhaps the single most important aspect of COP is that it builds strong, supportive relationships among its students and staff. It is this ‘ohana relationship—a positive feeling of being connected—that is so very important to the success of COP students at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Although it’s been 30 years since I was a COP student, the ‘ohana spirit continues to be a vital part of COP. This was reaffirmed recently as I sat in a COP presentation for some Kamehameha High School students. The COP counselor and two students from the program all emphasized the value of belonging to a group and having a place at the UHM campus to go for support as a definite benefit for COP students.

As I reflect upon my COP year, I recall the young man and several of his classmates, all of whom were quite excited and full of anticipation about being selected for COP. We were members of the first graduating class of Nānākuli High and Intermediate School and part of some 20 participants from the Wai‘anae Coast. Twenty more students were selected from the Kalihi-Pālama communities making a total of 40 COP students that year. COP began in 1970 as a federally funded program that was part of the national Model Cities effort to assist economically disadvantaged communities. After three successful years COP transitioned to State of Hawai‘i funding in 1973, and expanded to include students from the entire state. It has continued ever since.

There were about 140 students in my graduating class. Everyone—students, teachers and staff—knew everyone else and ours was a small, close-knit community. Compare that to the over 25,000 UHM students and a campus probably 10 times the size of Nānākuli High School. COP helped us to navigate in the huge and often times impersonal institution that is UHM. They helped us feel comfortable and confident in a place that would otherwise be so easy to be lost. The summer program taught us not only academics but perhaps just as important, the people and places that are UHM.

I was the first in my ‘ohana to attend a four-year college. They were very supportive and I could not have made it without them. But college was a completely new experience for me. I had no idea what it would be like and did not have family or friends close to
me, with college experience, to talk to. At times the fear of failure loomed heavy. But in
a way this served me well in that it motivated me to study and work hard. For example,
I have vivid memories of the autobiographical English class that fall semester 1972. It was
the first day of class and there I was in a room of 20 students, many of whom were recent
graduates of local private schools. Talk about feeling intimidated. Would I be able to
compete? Each week we turned in a type-written paper—there were no desk top
computers then. My first paper was returned peppered with red ink noting many run-on
sentences. I learned from this and made adjustments to my second paper which was
returned, again filled with red ink, this time noting fragmented sentences. Well with
perseverance and determination I got an A for that course and it sure boosted my self-
confidence. But I was not the only one growing in self-confidence. I think many of my
COP friends were also experiencing similar achievements. This achievement confirmed
our abilities and capacity to be successful in college. A definite reason for our success was
the support and connection we shared as a COP 'ohana.

Today I enjoy and love teaching my high school students our mother tongue— ka
'ōlelo Hawai'i—the Hawaiian language. Teaching is hard work, but it is a profession that
has great intrinsic rewards. I know that each of my students has the potential to achieve
and one day make a positive contribution to their 'ohana, community and society. Part
of this feeling comes from my positive COP experience. I realize that as a teacher, if I can
build positive relationships with my students— make a connection— then I can have a
positive impact on them.

I am thankful for all the kōkua that COP provided me. To the COP 1972–73 staff,
Bill Chambers, JoAnn Lum, Haunani Bernardino, Doris Bitner and all the other COP
staff who were always there for us, a warm mahalo to each and every one of you. Your
caring support and guidance over 30 years ago helped a young man realize his potential.
AHEAD OF THE GAME WITH COP

My name is Jera Bunghanoy and I graduated from Leilehua High School in 1994. During the beginning of my senior year in high school, I heard about the COP program through friends and was told that it's a possible alternative to get into the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa if you were denied regular admission. I also heard that COP is very helpful in learning the UH system and also provides a smooth transition from high school to college. So I applied and was thrilled to have been chosen as one of the participants.

Some of my friends thought I was nuts to participate in a program right after high school (COP started in the summer), but I pretty much bragged to them that I would be taking a college history class for free.

Thinking back, the COP program established me with new friendships, great counselors and college skills to support me as I entered my college career at UH Mānoa. The classes set up during the summer provided a peek into the college world. It was also a time to meet new people and learn great tips to survive in college. The dorm also provided a place to socialize and learn about the struggles of having a roommate!

The experiences and successes throughout my college career would not have been possible without the help of COP. I also worked in the COP office for four years through the federal work study program. This gave me the opportunity to get to know the staff better and actually see how the application process went.

I graduated from UH Mānoa in December 1998 with a bachelor of science degree in family resources. My focus is to work with at risk teenagers here in Hawai‘i. I started out working with teens in foster care. I now currently work for Kalihi YMCA as an outreach counselor based at Waialua High and Intermediate School. I enjoy working with teens and have also been able to get the word out to the teens in Waialua about the COP program.

I would also like to mention that my fiancee was also a participant in the COP program during the same year I was there. His name is Kainoa Pali and upon his graduation in May 1999, he moved back home on Moloka‘i and worked as a Hawaiian immersion teacher. Currently, Kainoa is a Hawaiian studies teacher at Moloka‘i High and Intermediate School. As we both focus on our careers, we are making plans soon to be on the same island one day!

I would like to thank the COP staff who have been very supportive throughout my college career at UH Mānoa. Thank you to Bill, who was the director at that time. Thank you to the counselors Sherril, Gina and Lesley. Thank you also to JoAnn, who was the secretary and my boss while I was there!
I graduated from James Campbell High School in 1983. I never really thought about attending college, because day-to-day survival took priority. When I was in the fourth grade my parents divorced. My sister and I were raised by my mom who worked six days a week to get off welfare. Tokens for lunch provided the one solid meal for the day. Scrapping up extra money to attend field trips and to participate in school activities became our entertainment. Attending Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church became our salvation. To keep us busy we were always participating in community sports and volunteering for church events. We were so busy that we never really thought twice about being poor. As I look back, I think about the times that we just did not have enough money to buy school clothes, supplies or even a Christmas tree. My sister and I knew my Mom loved us dearly. We knew that our grandmother would help us out when she could, and we knew that our good friends' families became our families too, so life was good.

Early in my senior year I realized that I needed to figure out what I was going to do after graduation. Suddenly I was scared. I needed to figure out how I was going to help change the financial situation our family was in. Throughout high school I was in college prep classes, but I did not have a strong grade point average. I knew the dreaded SAT test was going to be hard and long so a couple of my friends and I decided to take it at Punahou in the comforts of air conditioning. Of course the scores came back and I could not qualify to go to UHM. My high school counselor Mr. Ramelb mentioned the College Opportunities Program and told me I should apply. He said I was the student COP was looking for. The rest is history.

The COP program was, and I know still is, the best program on campus. It is an excellent program to prepare college freshmen for campus life—the intense writing college courses, interpersonal skills, study habits, discipline and don't let me forget to mention the parties. The summer program armed us with confidence and campus familiarity that helped us attack the long registration lines of the school year.

The experiences of the first and panel interviews to get into the program, the relationships and the values of the program are all things that I hold dear and use in my experiences today. I pray that COP will always have the funding it needs to thrive, expand and grow. My dream is that COP will be an opportunity for all kids in our state.

Thank God for the College Opportunities Program and the people who made it work and will continue to make it work.
COP 1993
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, BA in Sociology 1999
Kapi‘olani Community College, AS in Information Technology 2001

COLLEGE OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM CHANGED MY LIFE

Going to college is a privilege and not everyone gets that opportunity. More often than not, a formal education will dictate the friends you have and the life you live. In some cases, college will be the place where you find your future spouse.

In 1979, my mother, along with seven children, immigrated to Hawai‘i from Laos in hopes of a better life for us. She left behind an abusive husband, a close knit family and her homeland. She did not speak English and had no money. I was four then and my eldest brother was only 16 years old. My family was on welfare and we lived in public housing and continued to do so most of my adolescence. My family was dependent on my mom for everything. I cannot image how my mother was able to provide for us, but she did. My mother would continue to struggle most of her life. Although she eventually learned to speak English, she lacked the formal education to do anything that would pay her more than minimum wage.

Unlike my brothers and sisters, I, being the youngest, was fortunate enough to attend school from kindergarten on up. I had no burden of taking care of younger siblings. My mother valued education and would always preach to us that we do our homework and try to learn as much as we can. Although she wanted us to do well in school, she was unable to assist us in our schooling. As a result, my siblings and I struggled in school. We also had a difficult time assimilating to our new environment. Slowly my family began to crawl out of poverty as my older siblings graduated from high school and were able to find work to help the family.

Throughout my formal schooling, I was an average student that studied little or not at all. I applied for UH and was rejected because I had low SAT scores. I applied to COP and became an alternate. My outlook beyond high school was not very clear. I was later accepted by COP only after another COP recipient declined.

Being a part of COP is one of the best things that could have happened to me. With COP, I learned the skills necessary to be a successful student in college. I was able to build self-confidence while making a lot of new friends. COP allowed me to attend the university, while providing me with the support that I lacked.

I will never know what would have happened to me if not for COP. My path to the university would have been much longer. The one thing that I do know is that my life has been forever changed by the program. I was very privileged to have attended college and graduated. The same cannot be said about my other siblings.

Life is about second chances. What happened yesterday will never change, but the future can. COP was my second chance at a college education. COP is a great program because it helps minorities. We should not be ashamed of our upbringing and of who we are.

I am a little wiser now and know that the key to success is education. Although I am many years removed from college, continuing my education is a lifelong process.
Maryann Aguinaldo
Special Education Teacher, Kawānanakoa Middle School
Honolulu, Hawai‘i

COP 1991
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, BA in Ethnic Studies 1996
Chaminade University of Honolulu, Certificate of Teaching—Special Education
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, Candidate for MEd in Curriculum Studies with Middle Level Emphasis

I learned about COP during my senior year in high school through my school counselor. After struggling with low SAT scores, being the first in my family to go to college and the fear of having to leave the security of my family and friends, my counselor suggested I apply for COP.

Coming from a single parent home, my father was very supportive when I told him about COP. After prolonging my application, and knowing that this would open the door for me to begin my path in becoming a teacher, I finally filled out the application and mailed it on the very last date possible. I had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

During my summer with COP I learned the ups and downs of dorm life, the importance of time management and study skills, and how to take the city bus to where I needed to go. I also developed friendships.

COP gave me first hand experience of what life on a college campus was like. The program also provided needed support for me to succeed in and out of my classes—financial aid to counseling. I developed basic skills and network support that helped me stay in college and graduate. The rest was up to me.

Although I had several setbacks during my undergraduate work, I never let the idea of quitting cross my mind. I would try to find that backdoor to keep me going. After being denied entrance into the College of Education, my counselor suggested that I go after a BA in ethnic studies and try for my MEd after graduating. I graduated with my BA in 1996.

Upon returning home to Maui, I learned about a program where I could earn a certificate in special education teaching. I completed that program in 1999.

As of today, I am in my sixth year of teaching special education, five years at Lokelani Intermediate (Maui) and my first year at Kawānanakoa Middle (Honolulu). Six years after graduating with my BA, I had finally begun my MEd in curriculum studies with emphasis in middle level at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. This program began in June 2002. The projected graduation date for my cohort (Kukui Pio ‘Ole—the light that is always shining/burning; the flame that is never extinguished) is summer 2004.

To future COP students, don’t give up on your dreams there are backdoors... you just have to look for them.
What do you want? It's a simple question... or is it? I found myself asking this very question as my senior year in high school came to a close. Obviously, I wanted what most people would want... security, success and happiness. The only realistic way to achieve this was getting a degree from a university. Unfortunately I never took high school very seriously and found myself falling short of getting into any of the universities I wanted to attend. My school counselor then told me about the College Opportunities Program (COP), a program meant to help ethnic minorities achieve their dreams of attending a university. Getting into COP was competitive, but I managed it.

I once again found myself confronted with the question of what I wanted, only this time it was COP Director Bill Chambers asking the question during an orientation speech. How much are we willing to sacrifice to achieve our dreams, our goals, our desires. It was when Bill asked this that I realized that although it is true that the simple things in life are free, let's face it, when you're in the supermarket buying food you'll need money to pay the bill. It was time to make sacrifices in order to achieve my goals.

That was the summer of 1994. Nine years later I find myself constantly asking what I want and what I'm willing to sacrifice in order to achieve those goals, those dreams. One bachelors degree and one masters degree later, I find that I am not stagnant having achieved those objectives, but instead I am just as hungry and ambitious as the day Bill Chambers gave that orientation speech at Campus Center back in 1994. I understand that the key to success comes from having confidence in yourself in knowing that you are trying your very best to be a better person. COP has taught me a lot. It gave me the opportunity to go to UH. More than that, COP taught me the basic skills necessary to succeed in college. Before the fall semester even started I had already finished COP with three university credits and a head start over nearly every other incoming freshman on campus. The skills I picked up in COP helped me to obtain my bachelors and masters degrees. But more than this, COP helped me in life because there were people there, like Bill Chambers, who cared enough to teach that life is about making yourself a better person. Getting a degree is only a part of succeeding in college. The true success comes from the development of a mature, open-minded, productive citizen who is adaptable in life, confident in his or her abilities, hungry for new experiences, hungry for learning and therefore hungry for life.

I could never thank the College Opportunities Program enough for giving me a chance to prove to myself that I could achieve any objective I set for myself. So I do the only thing that I can do, I live life everyday doing my best and aspiring to do even better. I smile everyday with the realization that life is as much about the journey as it is about achieving a particular goal.
In the world in which we live, it is often important to ask the tough questions. As a fourth grade teacher, I encourage my students to do their best and to aspire everyday to do better so that when the time comes when they are faced with the question, what do you want, they will be able to answer the question, rise to the occasion and achieve all of their goals. After all, isn't it all that a mentor or parent could ever want, for those we care about to live their lives to the fullest and surpass the example set forth by the people who care about them? I know that somewhere Bill Chambers is relaxing on a couch with a margarita in his hand smiling because there are many COP students who got the message and succeeded in no small part because of a chance he took on us and the example he set. I am proud to be among those who continue to succeed.
It has been almost 20 years since my summer experience in the COP program but I can remember it as though it were yesterday. I was one of the lucky ones. You see I was on the wait list for the program and didn’t think I was going to have a chance at all.

In my junior year of high school, I finally realized that I wanted to go to college, not any college, but the University of Hawai‘i. I had done just enough to pass my classes and spent a lot of my time socializing, going to dances and football games. So when it came to my SAT results, the counselor was surprised. The first thing she asked was “What have you been doing in school?” My SAT scores were good but my GPA was not good enough for me to get into UH. She recommended I try for the COP program and that is where it all started.

The summer program was an eye opener for me. There were so many different students from so many different islands, different backgrounds and different experiences but all focused on one goal, to pass the summer program and enter UH in the fall. It was fun to get to know everyone but the biggest adjustment was being disciplined about my study habits.

Unfortunately, the pull to socialize and have fun and the need to buckle down and focus my attention on studying were always at odds. When I was called in to the COP director’s office because I wasn’t doing as well as was expected, I got a reality check. I always did enough in high school to get by, and I was continuing with the same pattern. I was barely passing the program.

What I have come to realize about the value of the COP program is that it provides you with all the skills that you need to be successful in college, gets you accustomed to the campus and the student services available to you, and best of all helps you to discover yourself, what your goals are and how to attain those goals.

The first day of fall was a breeze! We, of the COP ‘83 ‘ohana, had a head start over every other freshman starting at UH that fall and every fall since. Others looked to us to help them navigate the campus, understand the system, and of course lead them to the best places to eat lunch on campus. We were old pros by the time the summer program ended and the fall semester started.

I wish that I could say that my study habits improved but the first semester in college was pretty difficult. I was lucky to have my support network at COP to help me figure out what I needed to do to succeed. In the end, it is all up to you to decide what you want to do. I knew that I was paying for my education out of my own pocket; I knew that it was easy to drop your GPA but certainly very difficult to build it up and it was then that I made a decision. Work hard now and reap the reward later.

You know you might be the one who did just enough to pass, who preferred to socialize than study, well I can tell you that I finally buckled down and now I have a master’s degree and a great job. Take a look at your fellow COP alumni and count how many of us have master’s degrees. We did it so can you!
I was not necessarily a “bad” student. Nor was I necessarily an “honor” student. What I did know was that education—formal education—was extremely important. I knew that being educated would allow me to succeed in more ways than one. I knew all this from my upbringing as a Filipino.

I was born in the Philippines to a fairly large family (six children in the family). My parents decided to immigrate to the United States in hopes of the “American Dream.” We immigrated to the U.S. in waves—first my father, then my mother and I (I was three years old), followed by my other siblings. Today we continue to hear the phrase, “living paycheck-to-paycheck.” When I was a child, my family “lived paycheck-to-paycheck” while trying to live the American dream. Based on what I saw and experienced while growing up, I just knew I had to get a good education.

In my mind education would help lead to success. As a teacher, I heard a parent use this phrase to explain to his son the value of an education: “Education can mean the difference between working at McDonalds or working at McDonald-Douglas.” While growing up, I was never told, nor reminded, “You need to go to school.” Innately, I knew and made it a point to do my best in school.

All through my earlier educational experiences (from elementary through high school) I did my best to learn. I found that I had to work hard to get good grades, while my close friends seemed to effortlessly get good grades! It was during high school that I really got myself into “high-gear.” I knew that I just had to go to college. Again, this was because of my mentality: education = success. During high school, I busied myself with lots of extra-curricular activities. I knew (and I heard this continually in the years that I spent in high school) that colleges looked for well-rounded students. I took advantage of all the opportunities provided in school—academics and extra-curricular activities.

Although I was fairly confident of my grades and that I could qualify for being a well-rounded student with my participation in various activities, there was one big, gnawing problem the alphabet soup test, the SAT! I am not the best test taker, and my SAT score results confirmed just that! I continued to attend informational meetings held by various colleges that visited my high school. However, the prospect of attending those colleges on the mainland seemed to dwindle because of my SAT score and the cost of tuition! At this point, I began to visit my college counselor more frequently. Luckily, my college counselor brought the College Opportunities Program (COP) to my attention! At first, I was not too sure about the program. However, I really had nothing to lose by applying. I still can remember rushing to get all of the miscellaneous forms ready for submittal—it was all rush, rush, rush... but all worth the while!

I went through the (nerve-wracking) COP interview process and was accepted for entrance at UH Mānoa in the 1993 fall semester. As I stated earlier, I was not too sure about the program. However, I was definitely sure about getting a college education. COP was the perfect vehicle for me to do so!
As a COP participant, I feel I had an upper hand in getting adjusted to college as well as having a “support system.” The pre-semester portion held during the summer definitely prepared me for “college life!” The college courses I took were manageable because of my experience in COP. My academic performance was successful because of my experience in COP. In addition to academics, my personal attitudes and self-character developed through all the experiences I had during my college years. COP provided a stable foundation for me to grow positively both intellectually and socially. I took advantage of the resources and valuable skills I learned through COP.

With COP as my foundation, layered with continued support and guidance by COP, and cemented by my personal drive to do well, I was able to succeed. I earned my bachelor’s degree in journalism in the spring of 1998. I am proud to say that I am also the first person in my family to get a college education.

After college graduation I worked in the “real world” for two years. After experiencing some dissatisfaction for what I was doing in my job, I made the decision to return to school. Through this transitional period—real world job to back to college—I realized again how important COP was. As I debated the decision to go back to school, I inquired about the elementary education program at UH Mānoa. It dawned on me that I knew about certain programs in the college of education at UH because of the support I had in COP several years earlier! UH is not the easiest system to understand with all the colleges and different levels of entry into these colleges. However, with information I learned through talking with counselors and support staff at COP, I was able to “maneuver” my way back into the UH system. I earned another degree—bachelors of education—in the spring of 2001. I have just begun my career as an elementary school teacher with the Hawaii Department of Education.

The College Opportunities Program definitely provided me the opportunity to succeed, and be the best that I can be.
So many things have happened since the summer of 1991.

I can still taste that hot, windy day on Moloka'i nearly 12 years ago: at home, upstairs—in what was then my bedroom—I boxed all the clothes I owned, my toiletries, my school supplies and my surf, sport, fishing gear, excited as I was whenever I knew I'd be traveling somewhere I'd never been before. I'd have the opportunity to learn new things, get to meet new people and glean new views and ideas about the world. Packing was something I'd done many times before, at least twice a year since the seventh grade, in fact, where as a border at Kamehameha School I'd spent six years away, mostly gathering information about the places O'ahu held which my childhood friends and I had already recognized as problematic to our way of life, our living, our existence. Even then, I saw what I was doing as a form of activism because my reason for leaving was most of all to learn just how I might keep those things I cherished about my home preserved for the future generations of the island. Packing all of my belongings meant in many ways, not only preparation for movement from one physical place to another, but also preparation for departures from particular mental and emotional states. Moloka'i was, and still is, the place I call home. I wanted the taste in these moments to last forever, so I'd always remember the day I decided to leave Moloka'i in the physical sense—without knowing when I'd really be back—so I might keep with me a bit of who I felt I really was while I was away.

I know now that the taste in the air that day was salt, because in Kawela we lived steps from the shoreline, and the wind tainting down the southern coast and cutting through the kiawe brush around our house often brought faint mists of sea water right to our door. I remember the wind funneling through the window, rattling the mini-blinds, the occasional car whizzing by the two-lane highway right outside, my mom and dad talking downstairs about our ride to the airport, all the time thinking, *if I can just remember the taste of this moment, I will remember what it is like to be me. And since then, through all these years, I have not forgotten.*

What COP did for me was this: it prepared me to make transitions between various aspects of my life from that time on; it gave me a family away from home; it offered guidance; it kept me on-task, on-track. The program gave me nothing short of the best opportunity to get into places where I could learn about what I needed to know in order to succeed in a western world, without having to sacrifice the views and values I learned at home.
I have worked as an editor for two local literary journals, I have taught English and language arts courses at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, Kapi‘olani Community College and Hālau Kū Māna, a public charter school. I have traveled the country attending writing and teaching conferences, and most recently I have coordinated writing classes for the program. I have had the fortune to do all these things and still maintain the sense of who I am, thanks in a large part, to all those who helped me along the way, especially those mentors and peers I met in the summer of 1991. Mahalo nui!
Kimberly Fu
Police/Public Safety Reporter, The Reporter, Vacaville, CA

COP 1991
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
BA in Journalism 1997

When plans to attend a mainland college fell through due to finances, I figured I’d just join my friends at UH Mānoa. Who knew that the school’s entry requirements were tougher than the Utah college I was accepted into? Thanks to COP, attending college became a reality for me. Not only did I gain a shot at higher education, I also was given an instant support system. The COP staff kept my head above water when I thought I would drown and the friends I made in the program became more like family—we still keep in touch.

COP also taught me a lot about life and tackling tough situations—from bad roommates to low grades and dysfunctional relationships to graduation worries. Through it all, COP was there.

Staffers even helped me get into my career.

Les Tyson gave me my first writing job, as editor of the COP newsletter. I later went on to work for Ka Leo O Hawai‘i, the school newspaper, then the Honolulu Star-Bulletin. I also did a lot of freelancing on the side.

In 1999, I moved to California and snagged my first full-time reporting job. At The Reporter, my focus is on issues dealing with public safety. Stories run the gamut from traffic accidents to burglaries, fires and the War on Terror.

Right now, my time is split between work and school. I’m finishing a certificate in criminal justice and plan to enter a master’s degree program next fall.

COP and staff taught me that anything is possible, all I have to do is try. This, I pass on to you.

If you have the heart, dedication and drive to pursue a goal, you will succeed. And with COP, you’ll always have a cheering section.
THE SIXTH SENSE

Yesterday as I drove on Dole Street, I saw a pizza delivery car pull into the turnaround between Gateway and Frear Halls at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM). I was aware that the pizza was being delivered to Gateway, for Frear Hall has been vacant since 1998. Nonetheless, I continued my steady drive home from work at UHM’s Kua‘ana Native Hawaiian Student Development Services. Yet, the image of the pizza car weighed on my mind—the scent of pizza titillated it.

The image led me back to the summer of 1988 and my six-week tenure in UHM’s College Opportunities Program (COP). We were housed in a dormitory named after the gracious and talented Mary Dillingham Frear. Due to our habitual requests, Frear Hall was a regular drop-off point for Domino’s Pizza and the defunct Two for One Pizza companies. Pizza Hut could have benefited from COP’s 75 mostly hearty appetites, but they were not delivering at that time. Nevertheless, we eagerly waited for the touch of the warm boxes handed over by the delivery person and looked forward to our savory meal.

As in most social settings, food was central in our bonding. We ate, we studied, we ate, we laughed, we ate, we cried and we ate again. As we chipped in to buy these meals from our weekly stipend, each of us contributed a part of ourselves into it also. We liked its quantity and inexpensiveness. Most importantly, it had a positive impact on our senses. Disputes were put aside by the scent of pepperoni. Its quality was substandard to the laughter heard. The warm touch of pizza crust in our hands relieved any diminutive forms of carpal tunnel. The taste was secondary to the fulfilled appetites. This is the vision that weighs on my mind. I see it as if it was yesterday.

We, like the various pizza toppings, emerged from different surroundings and experiences. We coped with and strengthened our tumultuous passage into college—together. The fact that we did it together would make the producers of Survivor and the Mole penniless. We were able to do it through the support of the caring and competent COP staff. We could not forget and will never forsake the meaningful lectures from Bill, the supportive nudge from Fefe, the gentle reminders from Monette and JoAnn’s impeccable memory. We even looked forward to Aunty Patsy’s hugs every Friday when we received our stipends and it was not because of the money. They were the variety that gave spice to our lives. In fact, they were the spices. We, from different backgrounds, held the same needs—to survive, to succeed and to be loved.

Fifteen years have passed, since those warm and sense-filled moments in COP and at Frear Hall. I often hear news through the ‘coconut wireless’ about the whereabouts of the 1988 COP members. We have become parents, professionals and responsible citizens. For example, my COP roommate is currently a high school teacher in his hometown of Waianae. The clown of the group recently received a Hawai‘i Association for Recording
Artists award for Music Educator of the Year as the band teacher for Farrington—his alma mater. Another 1988 COP member and dear friend who lost her father in the middle of our program is a social worker. Meanwhile, several more of my COP cohort have become public educators and humanitarians. These are typical trademarks and examples of a program that unassumingly occupies a humble site on the UHM topography. COP has created individuals who work for the better of the whole. And developed those who, by choice, often go unnoticed as unsung heroes like the pizza delivery person. Their small deeds made a huge impact on our bonding. My memories of COP are ignited by my most simple acts too.

This morning, I was at a stoplight on Wai'alae Avenue. I saw people boarding a city bus from my car's rearview mirror. I immediately recall a memory. Hey did I mention the time a group of us off-island COP participants caught The Bus for the first time in front of St. Louis Chevron? That was fun—but for now I must focus on my driving.
As a young Filipino woman, I was always told that I HAD to attend college—that was the right thing to do. I can still hear my father, “education is everything; no one can take that away from you.” It was always expected of me, especially since my two older brothers preceding me were also enrolled at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The only problem was that I was not so sure if I had the skills and the knowledge to make it into the university.

Then, I learned about this wonderful program called the College Opportunities Program. I heard about it during my senior year at James Campbell High School. I attended a recruitment session that was being held at the school. As I was sitting there and listening to the presentation, I refused to consider myself as a high-risk student, which meant that I was disadvantaged in some way—be it academically, economically or socially. I did not necessarily consider myself to be a high achiever either, although I could be…when I wanted to.

At first, I was apprehensive about applying for this program and still was not sure if I wanted to give up my playtime during the summer. There were many “What if’s?” playing out in my head of why I did not want to go through with this. I kept thinking to myself, “What if I fail? What if no one likes me? What about my friends and my family back home?” I was grappling with all of these issues at that time, but after speaking with a few people and learning more and more about the program, I finally decided to take a risk and apply for COP. It was the best and most pivotal decision that I have ever made in my life.

I remember stepping onto the University of Hawai‘i campus when I attended my interviews for COP. My older brother helped me and guided me through the huge campus. Little did I know then that I would get to know this campus probably better than anyone else and I would call UH my home for the next seven or more years.

COP has tremendously helped me throughout my journey in college. The six-week summer program was one of the best times in my life. I was given the chance to meet lifelong friends through COP and learned a lot about life as an “adult” through this experience. This program has taught me a multitude of skills that I continue to use in my graduate study at UH. I have learned how to manage my time and how to survive the rigor of college life. I finally learned how to BE a high achiever, not just when I wanted to.

COP has helped me to find myself and my passion in life, which is helping “disadvantaged” students, such as myself, to succeed through college. This program has afforded me the opportunity to do this and I am forever grateful for this experience. A year has passed since I was involved in COP in a different light and I have more admiration and appreciation for this program than ever before. I feel that COP is vital to the University of Hawai‘i as well as to the many diverse students that we serve. I believe that I have come full circle and as a COP alumnus and employee, I do not feel that I or any COP alumni and students are “disadvantaged,” but rather “privileged” to have all of the support that this program has provided to us. Thank you so much!
As I sit and write this summation of being the best that you can be, I am anxiously awaiting the birth of our first son, Nainoa, in a couple of hours.

I’m sure without a doubt that I am probably going to have many face-to-face conversations with my son about the importance of education—especially HIGHER EDUCATION. With those thoughts in mind, I want to share with you my own encounters through which I have found my own successes. Hopefully, you will see the following not as being boastful, but as a testimony of inspiration that you too can accomplish. Believe me, none of the following would have happened if someone did not inspire, believe, help and motivate me to succeed.

Many moons ago, my lifelong ambition was to become a health professional. So you can imagine how crushed I was when I received notification that I did not receive admission into the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Hard work and miracles do happen. I was very fortunate that the College Opportunities Program gave me an opportunity to attend the university. If that wasn’t enough, they also gave me the tools to succeed here at the university. I eventually moved on in my long college career and graduated with my bachelor’s degree in nursing. Then I received a master’s in public health, with a 3.85 GPA in 1995. Pretty good, considering I was a “minority” and was not accepted for regular admission into the university as a freshman.

Higher learning was simply awesome! Between the many classes and meetings while on the Mānoa campus, I was very fortunate to meet lifetime friends and role models.

My employment history has been equally awesome. I was a resident advisor, a volunteer for various community and campus organizations, as well as a full-time recruiter/program assistant for the very program that gave me my start here on campus—the College Opportunities Program!

These exciting experiences did not end there—I worked in various hospitals and community health centers and even landed a couple of full-time hobbies. One was becoming the Stan Sheriff Center Host and a disc-jockey for KCCN FM 100. At this point, public speaking would never be the same to me. Energizing 10K plus warrior fans, hosting concerts and also conversing live on radio was truly a rush and a fantasy hobby come true. Needless to say, I bled green! Currently, I balance a career in public education and maintain a 13-year full-time career as a flight attendant for Aloha Airlines.

Life changes and so does your environment. But one thing should always remain constant—staying motivated to learn. Whether you find yourself rewarded with a COP scholarship or choose to attend a community college or decide on the work related route, never give up. Always remember to put your best foot forward. You just never know, the
next person you meet may someday become your boss or someone that could be a bridge that gets you to your next level of success.

In closing, I would just like to pass on my personal challenge to you, is for each of us “minority/disadvantaged” students to give back to our communities. It’s a chain reaction, one success equals another and another. Until one day we will change our status not only here at the university but in society as being the majority. Everyone needs a positive role model! Good luck and great knowledge!

COP is interested in hearing from the rest of the ʻohana. Please contact us. We look forward to hearing from you.
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