

OVAE Welcomes Albert Palacios!



Photograph by Bill Moser,
U.S. Department of Education

Albert Palacios recently joined OVAE's Division of Academic and Technical Education (DATE) as an education program specialist in the College and Career Transitions Branch. He will manage the Rigorous Program of Study grants and provide subject matter expertise in the areas of technology, communications, manufacturing, marketing, finance, business, transportation, and STEM. Prior to joining OVAE, Palacios was the lead labor policy analyst at Bloomberg Government during the launch of its BGov.com online information service. While there, he led a team of analysts who studied economic data and the impact of federal legislation and regulation on business, employment, and wages.

Palacios' professional pathway began at his high school, where he became president of the DECA chapter in Austin, Tex. DECA prepares emerging leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality and management in high schools and colleges around the globe. This step led Palacios to a 13-year career in banking that encompassed financial reporting, audits and investigations, marketing, and developing information systems. While working in banking, he earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Management from the University of Texas at Austin. In 1997 he relocated to the Washington, D. C. area to work at DTI Associates on OVAE's School-to-Work initiative. His most recent contractual engagement with the Department was with the Office of Postsecondary Education where he managed the peer review process for discretionary grants. As a senior content advisor at Command Decisions Systems and Solutions (CDS2), he facilitated rulemaking sessions from 2006 to 2010. These included negotiations on safe harbors for proprietary institutions, accreditation, student loan repayment, and other provisions of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. Palacios also served in a term appointment as a workforce development specialist in the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) Office of Workforce Investment supporting reemployment efforts under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). His work at ETA focused on developing a framework for collecting and disseminating best practices in workforce development. In his spare time, he enjoys working on automobiles, outdoor photography, travel, audio and video production, social anthropology, and quantum physics.

Discretionary Grant Competition for Reentry Education Projects

OVAE has a [discretionary grant competition](#) under way for reentry education projects. A webinar to provide information for potential applicants will be held on Dec. 10 at 1 p.m., EST. E-mail john.linton@ed.gov to register and you will be sent log-in information. The deadline for applications is Wednesday, Dec. 26 at 4pm ET.

The Opportunity Index

[Opportunity Nation](#), in partnership with [Measure of America](#), created the [Opportunity Index](#) out of a belief that what gets measured gets managed. According to Chris Cashman, director of communications for Opportunity Nation, "The Opportunity Index is the nation's only measure of what opportunity looks like at the state and county levels." The index uses 15 or 16 data points to "rank every state and assign almost every U.S. county a first-of-its-kind Opportunity Score ranging from 'A' for excellent to 'F' for failing." In essence, the 15–16 dimensions used in the index constitute the Opportunity Nation's definition of "opportunity."

The Opportunity Nation campaign compiled the index to put useful information about opportunity in the hands of the people who need it. The index is designed to empower community leaders, engaged citizens, and elected officials at all levels of government with knowledge about what actions create an opportunity-rich environment and how their communities fare when compared to others in the country. First launched in 2011, Opportunity Nation plans to report index results annually so that communities

and their leaders are able to track the progress of their efforts. As part of Opportunity Nation's recently launched [Areas Committed to Increasing Opportunity Now \(ACTION\) Communities](#), nearly a dozen communities across the country have committed to using the results of the index to help increase their area's opportunity score.

According to Cashman, information from the index has already helped begin to reshape the debate about economic mobility and opportunity in America. For example, the index shows an inverse correlation between the number of young adults aged 16–24 years old who are not connected to school or work, and the success of a community. There are nearly 7 million young adults who fall into this category, representing a wealth of untapped talent for the U.S. Opportunity Nation believes that, if we are to be competitive as a nation in the global economy, we need to make sure that all our young adults have the ability to "climb the ladder of success," and to do that we need to create new career pathways for young adults to access. As a consequence, a key tenant of the campaign's [Shared Plan](#) is to help re-envision and accelerate CTE in the U.S. Opportunity Nation believes that, by improving collaboration among secondary schools, post-secondary education, and industry, and aligning programs with regional and state workforce needs, CTE can become an integral pathway to help young adults successfully climb the ladder of opportunity in America.

Correctional Education Summit

OVAE hosted a [Correctional Education Summit](#) at the Department on Nov. 19, 2012, bringing together over 60 experts in correctional reentry for both adults and juveniles. Participants from across the country included practitioners, academicians, and advocates, as well as former students and administrators from correctional education, state and federal government, institutions of higher education, and the private sector. A fruitful discussion centered on needed improvements to the reentry process. Discussion groups investigated integrating education services, workforce training, and guided job search activities during all phases of incarceration—intake, confinement, and reentry. The discussions highlighted the need for using technology to increase program access, data to measure program performance, and thorough program evaluations to share lessons learned and best practices.

OVAE Assistant Secretary Brenda Dann-Messier opened the summit and congratulated participants on the vital work they were doing for students involved with the criminal justice system. Dann-Messier reminded the group of the more than 700,000 incarcerated individuals who leave state and federal prisons each year. She also announced a grant program for promoting education and workforce training for such individuals, "[Promoting Reentry Success through Continuity of Educational Opportunities](#)" (PRSCOE). It will make almost \$1 million available to support partnerships offering demonstration programs to assist in successful reentry. Its purpose is to discover best practices for reentry education and workforce models. All agencies eligible for Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) funding are also eligible to apply for PRSCOE, including the sole agency in a state or outlying area responsible for administering the distribution of AEFLA funds. Grant applications are due Dec. 26, 2012. Details are available at the PRSCOE link above.

Deputy Secretary of Education Tony Miller also addressed the group, reminding them that "equal employment and educational opportunities for all" is the civil rights issue of our generation. He concluded by noting the value of basic skills instruction to our economy and the need to create opportunities for students surrounded by cultures of crime. "We must rededicate ourselves to the fundamentals of education for all—and all means all."

In conjunction with the event, the Department released its new [Reentry Education Model](#) guidance document. It offers evidence-based practices to support individuals leaving prison in transitioning successfully into society through education and career advancement. Additional guidance on educational resources for incarcerated individuals approaching reentry is available through OVAE's [Take Charge of Your Future](#). This guide was updated recently to add advice and information for community corrections personnel to that provided for incarcerated individuals.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's closing remarks featured personal reflections on his educational experiences in crime-ridden neighborhoods in Chicago. He summed up his thoughts by saying, "I have seen how reentry programs in schools give people opportunity. If we don't build on these, we are part of the problem."