***ADVANCE** Journal*
Volume 7, Issue 1, March 2026

Introduction to the First Special Issue of Behind Enemy Lines: Advancing the Work of Inclusion, Equity, and Justice in Precarious Times and Places

aman agah, Anastasiia Boiko, Kayla Martensen, Nithya Rajan & Sarina Saturn

2026 Volunteer Managing Editorial Team of the ADVANCE Journal

Abstract: This introduction situates equity-focused scholarship within an increasingly hostile higher education landscape, where justice-oriented work is often carried out "behind enemy lines." Centering the voices of historically excluded scholars, the collection documents both the risks and resilience of this work, highlighting how community, care, and collaboration sustain efforts to advance inclusion, equity, and justice in precarious times.

Keywords: Equity and justice; Academic precarity; Resistance and resilience; Community-engaged scholarship

Contact Sarina Saturn sarina.saturn@oregonstate.edu

This collection emerges from a moment of profound uncertainty and profound commitment within higher education. Across universities and research institutions, scholars working toward inclusion, equity, and justice increasingly find themselves navigating coordinated political attacks on academic freedom, public skepticism toward science, and growing pressures on equity centered initiatives. For many educators, researchers, and community engaged scholars, this work now feels as though it is being carried out behind enemy lines.

The ADVANCE Journal issued a call for submissions for this special issue in response to this shifting landscape. We invited scholarly narratives and creative works that disrupt dominant culture policies and center the experiences of those historically excluded from STEM based equity initiatives, including women, BIPOC scholars, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, people with disabilities, contingent and at will faculty, and others whose work and identities place them at the forefront of current debates about the future of higher education. In a climate where scholars have been reassigned, dismissed, harassed, or silenced for pursuing justice-oriented work, we sought contributions that document both the risks and the resilience required to continue this work.

The contributions in this section illuminate these tensions from multiple vantage points. In a photo essay reflecting on the editorial team's retreat on the Oregon coast, we document a moment of collective reflection on the past, present, and future of the ADVANCE Journal. Kelly Mack, Sarina Saturn, and Janet Lockhart offer an editorial tribute to founding editor Susan Shaw, whose feminist editorial leadership helped shape the journal's mission and community. In a statement on feminist co-authorship, I-Yun Lee, Eric Warren-Koski, and Yolyamanitzin Gomez, reflect on the ethics and responsibilities of collaborative scholarship. Personal scholarly narratives by Finn Johnson and Enrique Salonga examine the risks and resilience involved in pursuing justice-oriented work within institutions that can both enable and constrain it, addressing respectively the institutional vulnerabilities faced by trans graduate researchers during coordinated harassment campaigns and the

complexities of mentoring and sustaining equity centered work amid backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

Together, these contributions reflect a vision of scholarship that has long guided the ADVANCE Journal: work that is intellectually rigorous, politically engaged, and rooted in community. That vision was shaped in large part by the journal's founding editor, Susan Shaw, whose commitment to feminist scholarship, developmental editing, and the cultivation of diverse voices continues to inform the journal's direction.

This collection represents the first group of contributions to the Behind Enemy Lines special issue. Additional pieces, including scholarly narratives, poetry, and other creative and multimodal submissions, will appear in a forthcoming installment, further expanding this conversation about how scholars continue to advance inclusion, equity, and justice even in precarious times and places.

If the current moment demands courage, it also demands community. The voices gathered here remind us that even when institutions falter, scholars continue to imagine and build more just futures together.