Scholars Encouraged to Pursue Their Dreams

On Friday, April 22, the McNair Scholars Recognition Reception was held at the Lied Center, with almost 90 Scholars, faculty and graduate student mentors, friends, and family members in attendance. At this annual event, we celebrate Scholar accomplishments and recognize faculty and graduate student mentors for their support of the Program.

Honored guests for the evening were the May and August 2011 graduates, who were awarded dictionaries embossed with their name and “McNair Scholars Program.” The graduates also received a sky blue honor cord, in memory of Dr. Ronald McNair’s flight suit, to wear for the commencement ceremony.

The featured speaker was Maria José Herrera, a UNL clinical psychology graduate student, who talked about her McNair experience at the University of California Berkeley and how it made possible the pursuit of her academic ambitions. She affirmed, “Looking back, I can honestly say that had it not been for the McNair program, I would not be actively pursuing a Ph.D. today.”

As a first generation college student and as a Latina, two classically underrepresented populations at the doctoral level, Maria had never imagined she could pursue a Ph.D. and had never met a researcher in the field of clinical psychology of Latino descent, until she met her McNair mentor, Dr. Ricardo Muñoz. He served as an excellent role model because he was a researcher who contributed not only to the field’s general body of knowledge regarding depression treatment but he was also working directly to strengthen the body of literature on depression treatment for Latinos. The work Maria completed with Dr. Muñoz has also served as a springboard for her current research interests.

“At a time of pivotal importance, the McNair Program believed in me more than I believed in myself – they dreamed for me what I didn’t know I could dream,” Maria continued; “I remember vividly the time my thoughts shifted from ‘IF I go to graduate school’ to ‘WHEN I go to graduate school.’ After presenting research findings at national conferences in Wisconsin and California, I conveyed to my McNair director that I wanted to do this again and again. I knew then what the McNair program staff knew all along – that I desired and was capable of successfully attending graduate school. They also were very supportive in helping me make the tough decision to leave my home state and my close-knit family in order to attend graduate school.”

Ms. Herrera noted she was “incredibly grateful for the preparation, commitment, support and guidance afforded by the McNair program. They helped me embark on the true last leg of the academic race, and I look forward to 2013 when I become Dr. Herrera,” she beamed. “In short, this is what the McNair program dreamed for me, and for all of you McNair scholars.”

McNair Mentors Honored for Contributions

A highlight of the McNair Recognition Reception was the presentation of two awards acknowledging a faculty member and a graduate student who’ve made significant contributions to the McNair Scholars Program and to our Scholars.

Dr. Carl Nelson, associate professor of mechanical engineering, received the 2011 McNair Faculty Appreciation Award. In presenting the award, Dr. Laurie Bellows noted that Dr. Nelson is approachable, responsive, and someone our Scholars can count on to answer technical questions and point them in the right direction. With Dr. Nelson’s guidance, Khoa Chu, a senior mechanical engineering student and McNair scholar, received a research grant from the NASA Nebraska Space Grant Fellowship Program and last fall earned an internship with NASA's Undergraduate Student Research Program. Khoa has spent the past two semesters at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California. Khoa credits Dr. Nelson for giving him the confidence to pursue a career in research and development within the aerospace and robotics field.

The 2011 McNair Graduate Student Appreciation Award recipient was Sarah Beal, a developmental psychology doctoral candidate. Sarah’s mentees noted that she helped them grow as scholars—from developing a sharp focus to becoming independent thinkers. Sarah’s energy, passion, encouragement, support and integrity are the qualities that make her a great graduate student mentor.
Lopez Awarded Goldwater Scholarship

Jeffrey Lopez, a junior chemical engineering major, has been awarded a 2011 Goldwater Scholarship. The nationally competitive scholarship awards up to $7,500 a year for sophomores and juniors preparing for careers in science, engineering and mathematics. The program was established by Congress to honor the memory of Sen. Barry M. Goldwater.

“It’s really a huge honor to have been selected,” Lopez said. His current plans are to study materials science in graduate school. He said he hopes the Goldwater Scholarship will open doors for his post-graduation plans. “My goal is to gain a faculty position at a research institution,” Jeff added.

Through his participation in the McNair Scholars Program and UNL’s Undergraduate Creative Activities and Research Experiences program, Lopez conducts research with Dr. Ravi Saraf, professor of chemical and biomolecular engineering. Together, they’re working to develop an enzyme sensor that could be used for comprehensive diagnosis and monitoring of diseases like diabetes and congestive heart failure.

“Working for Dr. Saraf has had an enormous influence on my academic experience,” Lopez said. “I would not have received the Goldwater without my research experience.”

“Jeff is a very proactive and highly motivated student,” Saraf said. “I usually do not take on sophomore students, but in his case I made an exception and I am glad I did.”

Lopez said doing research on campus has focused his career path. “Before my research experience, I had only thought about pursuing a career in research, but now I can’t see myself going anywhere else,” he said.

Adapted from a UNL Office of University Communications news release 4/6/11: http://newsroom.unl.edu/releases/2011/04/06/North%27s+Lopez+awarded+Goldwater+scholarship

Published Scholars

McNair Scholars authored and co-authored numerous recent publications, including:


Beth Ridling (2010). Insight and Locus of Control as Related to Aggression in Individuals with Severe Mental Illness (SMI). The UNL McNair Scholars Research Journal.

Scholars Complete Honors Theses

Congratulations to our Scholars who completed an original, thesis-length research project:

Karise Carrillo, Examining Attitudes on Organ Donation for Transplant: Amenability to Financial Incentives and Donor Benefits, supervised by Dr. Susan Jacobs, Criminology and Criminal Justice, and Dr. Cal Garbin, Psychology.

Beth Ridling, Emotion Regulation in Individuals with Severe Mental Illness: Suppression, Clarity, and Emotion Regulation Training, supervised by Dr. William Spaulding and Dr. Debra Hope, Psychology.

Sherri Sklenar, Excavation at Wyoming, Nebraska, supervised by Dr. Paul Demers, Anthropology.

Brittany Sznajder-Murray, Help-seeking behaviors of women with alcohol use disorders, advised by Dr. Cody Hollist, Child, Youth and Family Studies.
Graduates Announce Postbaccalaureate Plans

Moving on to the next stage of their careers, McNair scholars share their postbaccalaureate plans:

Karise Carrillo will pursue a Ph.D. in criminology at the University at Albany, State University of New York beginning in Fall 2011.

Khoa Chu plans to work as a mechanical design engineer in the aerospace or defense industry, and then apply to graduate programs in optical, electrical, or material engineering.

Justin Escamilla will study criminology, law, and justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago’s Ph.D. program. Justin received the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship.

Alan Goyzueta will enter the mechanical engineering master’s program at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Alan received a research assistantship.

Michael Gubbels accepted an offer from the computer science doctoral program at the University of Maryland, College Park. He received a teaching assistantship and will focus his research on the areas of human-computer interaction and artificial intelligence in the Human-Computer Interaction Lab (HCIL).

Alex Goldstein will enter the M.D. program at the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine in El Paso, Texas.

Katie Haferbier was accepted to the Eppley Cancer Institute Graduate Program at the University of Nebraska Medical Center beginning in June 2011. Katie’s graduate study will be funded with a research stipend.

Beth Ridling will be taking a year off to work, then applying to graduate programs.

Tyler Scherr will enter the Biomedical Research Training Program at the University of Nebraska Medical Center beginning July 2011. Tyler will be funded with a research stipend.

Sherri Sklenar will enter the anthropology master’s program at Texas State University–San Marcos in Fall 2011.

Brittany Sznajder-Murray will be pursuing a doctorate in human development and family science at Ohio State University. Brittany received the OSU Summer Research Opportunities Program Fellowship.

Gearing Up for the Summer Research Experience

Summer is the season when many undergraduates take a break from their studies. McNair Scholars, however, will be delving into a research project under the guidance of a faculty mentor. They’ve been preparing for the McNair Summer Research Experience (MSRE) since last fall, completing their review of literature and preparing to put their research plan into action. By the end of the July, they’ll have produced a 15- to 20-page research paper, a research poster and oral presentation of their work. Eight Scholars will be participating in the 2011 MSRE.

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UNL McNair Research Journal

In Fall 2010, the UNL McNair Scholars Program started publishing an online journal. The McNair Scholars Research Journal (MSRJ) is comprised of original journal articles written by scholars under the guidance of their faculty mentors. The MSRJ is hosted by Digital Commons, an online site through UNL Libraries that aims to bring together and store all of UNL’s research under one umbrella. Access the MSRJ at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/mcnair/
The 17th Annual Undergraduate Research Conference, sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Studies, was held during the April 2011 UNL Research Fair. Seventeen McNair scholars were among the 238 students who showcased their research during the poster session, including:

**Misam Ali** – *Ethnic Studies in the New Millennium.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Carleen Sanchez, Anthropology and Ethnic Studies.

**Karise Carrillo** – *Examining Attitudes on Organ Donations: Group Discussions on Alternative Incentives.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Susan Jacobs, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice.

**Justin Escamilla** – *Merit and the Allocation of Resources.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Brian Bornstein, Psychology Department.

**Melissa Garfield** – *Life History Transitions of Female Status Attainment in Traditional Societies.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Raymond Hames, Anthropology Department.

**Zach Garfield** – *The Ecology of Prosocial Status Attainment in Egalitarian Societies.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Raymond Hames, Anthropology Department.

**Alex Goldstein** – *Impact of Dietary Fat on Body Fat.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Concetta DiRusso, Biochemistry Department.

**Katie Haferbier** – *Endogenous and Exogenous Hyaluronan Uptake in Prostate Cancer Cells.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Melanie Simpson, Biochemistry.

**Michelle Haikalis** – *Treatment Outcomes in Juvenile Delinquents: The Relationship with Previous Treatment and Person-Related Variables. The Interaction Among Gender, Sexual Abuse and Home Role Impairment as they Relate to Impairment in Behavior Toward Others.* Faculty Mentors: Dr. David Hansen and Dr. Cal Garbin, Psychology.

**Arianna Holland** – *My Eyes are Up Here: the Nature of the Objectifying Gaze.* Faculty Mentors: Dr. Sarah Gervais and Dr. Mike Dodd, Psychology.

**Kaitlin Leslie** – *Some Error Rates Associated with the Angle of Impact Calculations.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. David Carter, Entomology.

**Jeff Lopez** – *A Novel Enzyme Chip Using Localized Electrochemistry.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Ravi Saraf, Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering.

**Alyssa Lundahl** – *Emotional Reliance and Assertiveness in Predicting Self-Confidence for Males and Females. Predicting Mood and Emotional Difficulties in Juveniles After Six Months of Treatment: A Comparison of Males and Females.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Cal Garbin, Psychology.

**Karina Pedroza** – *The Subjective Experience of Social Class.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Sarah Gervais, Psychology Department.

**Beth Ridling** – *Emotion Regulation in Individuals with Severe Mental Illness: Suppression, Clarity, and Emotion Regulation Training.* Faculty Mentors: Dr. William Spaulding and Dr. Debra Hope, Psychology.

**Tyler Scherr** – *Proteomic Analysis of Geobacillus stearothermophilus Primase.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Mark Griepe, Chemistry.

**Sherri Sklenar** – *Changing Frontier Landscapes: An Analysis of Archaeology.* Faculty Mentor: Dr. Paul A Demers, Anthropology.

**Brittany Sznajder-Murray** – *Understanding Women’s Help Seeking for Alcohol Problems: New Directions for Research.* Faculty Mentors: Dr. Cody Hollist, and Dr. Paul Springer, Child, Youth and Family Studies.

The McNair Program is a focused, comprehensive program that provides much more than advice on how to prepare for entrance to a graduate program. Participating Scholars become an integral part of a learning community, receiving support from each other, McNair Program staff, UNL faculty, and other resources as they develop the research skills they need to prepare for the next stage in their educational careers.
Participation in Regional and National Colloquia


Beth Ridling – (March 2011). The Importance of Recognizing All Types of Sexual Assault: A Review of Literature on Same-sex Sexual Assault. No Limits Women’s and Gender Studies Conference, University of Nebraska–Kearney.


As a McNair Scholar, it’s essential to build a strong and well-balanced curriculum vitae (CV), or academic resume, during your undergraduate career to get into the graduate program or school that you desire.

Throughout your time in the McNair Scholars Program, you’ll be involved in activities that demonstrate your ability to succeed academically. It’s important to keep track of these events so you have an accurate record of your professional development. Graduate programs are increasingly looking for applicants who are not only successful in the classroom, but also active in research and knowledgeable in their career field generally.

The experience you gain through the McNair Summer Research Experience is invaluable when admission committees begin to evaluate and compare applicants. Each research project you’ve been involved in should be included on your CV, and in some cases, it may be appropriate to give a brief summary of the project and your role in it. Along with research experiences, your CV should list any courses in which you’ve excelled or through Student Support Services to tutor fellow students for courses in which you’ve excelled.

If teaching is something that’s important to you or will be part of your graduate career, check with your department for tutoring or undergraduate teaching assistant opportunities. Also, there may be undergraduate positions available at the Hewit Center or through Student Support Services to tutor fellow students for courses in which you’ve excelled.

For some disciplines, certain valuable skills can be listed on a CV. For example, students in the social sciences often include their skill level or experience with advanced statistical analysis methods and programs. Similarly, engineers and students in computer science might find it relevant to include their experience with programming or modeling programs. In each case, think about the skills that will be essential in your graduate study – then develop them!

Finally, keep track of honors and awards you receive, including scholarships and other monetary awards that apply to your college career. And, as a member of a nationally recognized program, make sure to include that you’re a McNair Scholar. For more information about putting together a strong CV, talk to your faculty mentors; they can provide insight as to what is appropriate in your discipline. Your CV is a living document. Keep adding to it as you gain additional experience and accomplishments.
Honors, Awards and Leadership Activities 2010-11

McNair Scholars continue to make an impact on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus and in the community through their volunteerism and leadership roles. This is just a partial listing of their campus and community involvement:

Reinaldo Alcalde – SUCCESS Scholar; Union Pacific Foundation Scholarship; Dean's List; Nebraska Achievement Scholarship; Maud Melick Appreciation Scholarship; A. & D. DeVries Scholarship; Engineering Peer Mentor- for incoming freshmen; Big Event Executive Committee - Operations Staff Head; Farm House Fraternity; and Chi Epsilon Civil Engineering Fraternity.

Misam Ali – University Honors Program; UCARE; Dean's List; Sigma Alpha Lambda Honor Fraternity; The National Society of Collegiate Scholars; Nebraska Bankers Association Scholarship; The Office of Academic Success & Intercultural Services Academic Excellence Award 2010; W.E.B. Du Bois Honor Society President; Cather Circle Member; William H. Thompson Scholars Community; Kids Against Hunger; and Teammates.

Karie Carrillo – National Merit Hispanic Scholar; Innocents Society Outstanding Senior Award; UCARE; Dean’s List; Teaching Assistant for Dr. Eve Brank in the Psychology Department; Mexican American Student Association President; and Diversity Strategic Development Committee Member.

Khoa Chu – NASA Undergraduate Student Research Intern at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

Mollie Dittmer – Dean’s list.

Justin Escamilla – UCARE

Melissa Garfield – Student Undergraduate Liaison for Department of Anthropology Academic Program Review; UCARE; Dean’s list; AnthroGroup Treasurer; Anthropology Section Co-Chair for the 2011 Nebraska Academy of Sciences, Nebraska Wesleyan University; McGinnis Prize for best undergraduate Anthropology presentation; 2010 Nebraska Academy of Sciences; guest speaker for Dr. Wayne Babchuk’s ANTH 412/812 Social Structure class on A Cross-Cultural Investigation of How Women Achieve Status in Traditional Societies; Assistant to the Treasurer for the Human Behavior and Evolution Society; National Society of Collegiate Scholars; Alpha Lambda Delta Honor Society; and Phi Eta Sigma Honor Society.

Zach Garfield – AnthroGroup co-president, organized and moderated the Sixth Annual AnthroGroup Conference; guest speaker for Dr. Wayne Babchuk’s ANTH 412/812 Social Structure class on Status and Prosociality in Egalitarian Societies; UCARE; Dean’s list; National Society of Collegiate Scholars; Alpha Lambda Delta Honor Society; and Phi Eta Sigma Honor Society.

Alan Goyzueta – National Hispanic Scholar; UCARE; Martin C. Hemsworth Scholarship; R & S Haase Scholarship; Engineer-In-Training (EIT) Certification; Tau Beta Pi Vice President; Pi Tau Sigma; and American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

Michael Gubbels – Undergraduate Research Assistant for Dr. Stephen D. Scott, Department of Computer Science and Engineering.

Katie Haferbier – UCARE

Michelle Haikalis – UCARE; Dean’s List; National Hispanic Scholar; Undergraduate Psychology Organization; Alpha Chi Omega Sorority Chapter President; and Psi Chi Secretary Elect.

Arienne Holland – UCARE; Dean’s List; and Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Corps supplemental instruction for Psych 288.

Brittany Jones – Dean’s List; Ruth Leverton Scholarship; and Sandoz Hall Resident Assistant.

Jeff Lopez – Association of Students of the University of Nebraska Internal Vice President; National Hispanic Scholar; Dean’s List; University Honors Program; Tau Beta Pi Engineering Honor Society; UCARE; Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship; Committee for Student Fees Allocation; Engineering Diplomat; American Institute of Chemical Engineers; President of the Water Polo Club President; and Staff Adviser for the Nebraska Human Resources Institute.

Kaitlin Leslie – TA for Dr. Carter’s FORS 120 Lab; UCARE; and Forensic Science Club.

Alyssa Lundahl – Undergraduate Research Coordinator for Dr. David Hansen’s Child Maltreatment Lab; research assistant in Dr. Timothy Nelson’s Pediatric Health Lab; research assistant in Dr. Robert Belli’s Memory Lab; UCARE; Dean’s List; Nebraska Top Scholar; 4.0 Distinguished Scholar; Peter Kiewit Legacy Scholarship; Regents Scholar; Dr. Lillian G. Portenier Scholarship; Honors Textbook Scholarship; Psi Chi Honor Society President and Outstanding Membership Award; Undergraduate Psychology Organization President; Undergraduate Psychology Student Representative for the Academic Program Review; and Phi Eta Sigma Honor Society.

Christian Padilla – National Hispanic Scholar; College of Engineering scholarship; University Honors Program; Dean’s list; and Knoll Council Floor representative.

Karina Pedroza – UCARE; Dean’s List; T.A. for Psych 100: Career Planning for Psychology Majors; Lambda Theta Nu Sorority, Inc., President; Multicultural Greek Council Secretary; Mexican American Student Association; and Cultural Ambassadors President.

Beth Ridling – Graduated with Highest Distinction; University Honors Program; University of Nebraska Regents Scholar; Phi Beta Kappa; UCARE; and Dean’s List

Tyler Scherr – Research Assistant for Dr. Mark A. Grier, Department of Chemistry; UCARE; Research Assistant at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital Movement and Neurosciences Center of Excellence; Dean’s List; Wayne and Virginia Thurman Scholarship; and Tau Beta Pi National Engineering Honor Society.

Sherri Sklenar – Graduated With Distinction; UCARE; Dean’s List

Brittany Szajdjer-Murray – Graduated with High Distinction; Graduated from the Honors Program, Superior Scholar; Dean’s list; UCARE; Camp Catch-Up Staff Community Outreach; and Therapeutic Mentor at St. Monica’s behavioral health services.

McNair Recommendations

Do you know an undergraduate who might be a good candidate for the McNair Scholars Program? We welcome and appreciate recommendations from faculty and advisers.

To recommend a student, email or call Carol Boehler, cboehler2@unl.edu, 402-472-5062.
Chi Min Seow, a graduate research assistant in Department of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, shares his advice regarding graduate school. He notes that his advice comes from his experiences as an engineering student and may not be applicable to all majors.

Be clear about why you are here. Everyone in graduate school has their personal reasons for pursuing a graduate degree. It doesn’t matter what your friends are doing—you should be very conscious about your own decisions. Sure, the economy is bad, but you have a college degree. You should be ahead of many other people looking for jobs. An internship might be a good way to get a sense of what it’s like out there. If you believe you have learned the required skill sets and a dream job is currently not available, find something to do while you wait for the opportunity to come by. Graduate school in many cases means at least a year’s commitment on a very specific project in a very specialized field. If the field doesn’t interest you at all, you’re in for a gloomy period of time in your life.

You can spend forever on ideas. This is especially true for engineering majors where creative solutions to problems are always needed. There are many resources a graduate student can make use of when generating ideas. Textbooks, scientific journal papers, online articles, patents, are just some examples. One should be aware of the time spent coming up with an “idea”. In many cases, solving the problem should be placed ahead of generating an idea. No one cares about how much you have done to come up with an idea; the main thing is to get the problem solved. After all, you are not the only one involved in this. Your advisor and project client are in it as well. It’s in everyone’s interest to see a positive outcome in a timely manner.

Always keep your advisor informed about your situation. Your advisor should be aware of your current situation, and is the best person to give you advice on your research. I have seen people spending a lot of their time trying to move forward on research by themselves. They read research papers after research papers, planning their own research but never actually get down to doing it and moving things in the right direction. The expectations and deliverables should be communicated very frequently between you and your advisor.

If you don’t know something, ask someone about it. I learned this from Dr. Randal Pinkett when he visited UNL a couple of years ago and I have found it to be true. You may not know everything about your project, and that’s okay. The most important thing is you must be willing to seek advice from other people who know more than you. Ask your advisor or your colleagues. People are more willing to help you than you might think.

Grades are important, but not as important as your research. Grades are important, yes. Depends on what your goals are. It is definitely better to have both stellar grades and a breakthrough research outcome. However, if the course work is taking too much time, one or two A minuses won’t hurt much if you can produce something extraordinary with your research. After all, your research is what people will identify you with when you’ve graduated.

Make your work known to other people. Publish your work from time to time. Communicate with your advisor about publishing opportunities. Attend conferences to learn about other people and research. Enter your work in competitions if possible. Making your work known will help you when you need some credibility in the future. A researcher you get to know at a conference could very well be your colleague in the future.

Remember, always think ahead. Before you know it, graduate school will be over. Always be prepared for the future.