

## Meet the 2011 McNair Cohort

Members of the 2011 Cohort were welcomed into the McNair Scholars Community at the annual fall orientation. The group participated in a “thinking big” exercise, and then learned about the work that faculty “do” in a conversation with Dr. Melanie Simpson, Associate Professor and Grad Chair of the Department of Biochemistry. Dr. Simpson spoke about her road to becoming an academic, from her progression through her doctoral studies in biochemistry at the University of Minnesota to her current position at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

The new Scholars have been quickly immersed in their new roles. They’ve selected their faculty research mentors and have identified their research projects for the 2012 McNair Summer Research Experience. Members of the 2011 Cohort and their mentors include:



**Bridget Agnew**, a psychology and sociology major from Omaha, Nebraska, will conduct research with Dr. Helen Moore, Sociology.



**Emmilie Baker**, a psychology major from Lincoln, Nebraska, is working with Dr. Sarah Gervais, Psychology.



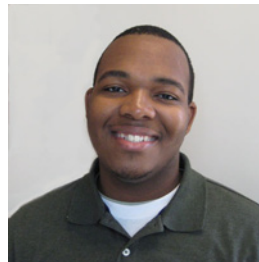
**Ross Benes**, a psychology major from Brainard, Nebraska, is working with Dr. P.D. Harms, Management.



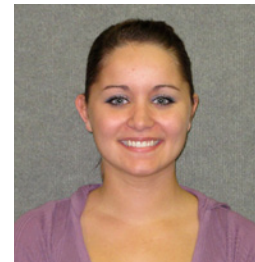
**Eric Harmes**, a psychology major from Lincoln, Nebraska, is working with Dr. David DiLillo, Psychology.



**Maggie Gossard**, a psychology major from Lincoln, Nebraska, is working with Dr. Sarah Gervais, Psychology.



**Kenneth Herron**, an English major from Kansas City, Missouri, will be working with Dr. Kwakiutl Dreher, English & Ethnic Studies.



**Brooke Micek**, a biological systems engineering major from Duncan, Nebraska, is working with Dr. Melanie Simpson, Biochemistry.



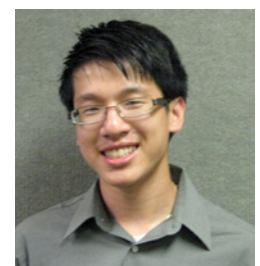
**Moses Pacheco**, a civil engineering major from Dakota City, Nebraska, will be working with Dr. Dean Sicking, Civil Engineering.



**Nina Quinones**, a psychology major from Katy, Texas, will be working with Dr. Mike Scheel, Educational Psychology.



**Daniel Sotelo Leon**, a biochemistry and French major from Thornton, Colorado, is working with Dr. Melanie Simpson, Biochemistry.



**Joseph Tran**, a biological systems engineering major from Lincoln, Nebraska, will be working with Dr. Carl Nelson, Mechanical & Materials Engineering.

# Making the Transition from Student to Scholar



2010 Cohort participated in the 2011 Summer Research Experience

One of the most challenging, yet rewarding, aspects of being a McNair Scholar is participating in the McNair Summer Research Experience (MSRE). During MSRE, Scholars develop critical research skills under the guidance of a faculty mentor, as well as the ability to communicate their research results in written and oral forms. This experience is similar to a mini-graduate school boot camp because, just like graduate students, Scholars are expected to be reliable, accurate, self-sufficient, and independent thinkers.

Prior to the start of MSRE, Scholars learn how to write a proposal, design a research project, and conduct a literature review. During MSRE, they gather and analyze data, draw conclusions based on empirical evidence, and report results in a paper, poster, and oral presentation.

Even though they may not realize it at the time, McNair Staff take note of the fact that Scholars gain confidence through the MSRE process. The Scholars explain the impact of successfully completing their summer research project and presenting at the national California McNair Conference at UC-Berkeley:



*"My confidence in applying and attending a graduate school to pursue my doctorate degree increased tremendously."*  
- Rei Alcalde



*"If I walked away with anything from this experience, I learned how to not only get into graduate school, but it is a goal that I can see clearer now and can truly accomplish."* - Misam Ali



*"This experience has been vital to my emerging professional career. I feel that I am much more prepared now than I would have been had I not been selected to be part of the McNair cohort at UNL."* - Mollie Dittmer



*"This conference made me feel good about what I have been doing so far as a student and as a scholar. It made me realize that the research I have been doing and will continue to do is important, and makes me feel like I'm on my way to achieving my goals to get my Ph. D."*  
- Nathan Lilienthal



# Scholars Gain Skills and Confidence during MSRE 2011

*"It was an experience I would gladly have again because of the people I have met, the experience I gained, and the anticipation I have built for my journey to graduate school!"*

- Christian Padilla



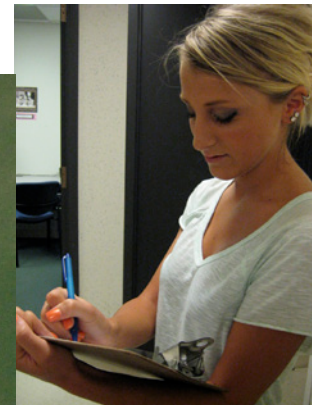
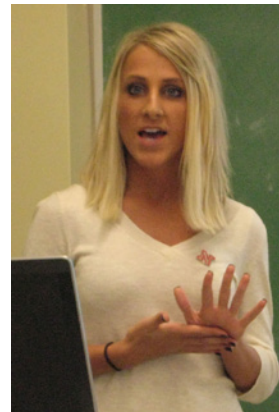
*"The skills I learned during this summer will definitely continue to help me as I apply and attend graduate school, and eventually in my career."*

- Karina Pedroza



*"I know I'll be well prepared when I apply to graduate school, because I'll incorporate the things I've learned and plan out well in advance. After listening to the presentations, I specifically know what I want to pursue in grad school and the steps I need to get there."*

- Brittany Jones



*"Through these experiences, I have learned an abundant amount about the research process in both my own and other disciplines, on how to create a professional presence, and on how important it is to be accepting and welcoming of ideas from all individuals."* - Alyssa Lundahl



# Scholars Present at National McNair Conference

In August, members of the 2010 UNL Cohort presented their research during the California McNair Symposium held at UC Berkeley. It was a journey that would bring their summer research project to fruition. The feeling of successfully completing a mini-research project and sharing that work with others across the country provides students with confidence in their abilities. Nathan Lilienthal noted, "This conference made me feel good about what I have been doing so far as a student and as a scholar."

The experience gave them insight into the academic conference process, and for many, left a lasting impression. Christian Padilla summed things up when he said, "the Berkeley conference helped me learn a lot, from presentations I attended and the conversations I had with some interesting people I would not have met otherwise."



## Mentor Spotlight: Dr. David Hansen

In the UNL McNair Program, Scholars carry out a research project from start to finish, under the guidance of their faculty mentor. Faculty mentors are an integral part of the program, as they assist the Scholars in developing their research and professional skills.

One of the many valued mentors who has worked with the Program is Dr. David Hansen, Professor and Chair in the Psychology Department, whose primary research interest is child maltreatment, including intervention, assessment, and consequences. He strategically recruits students whose research interests align with the lab's goals and who have some applied experience working with children, adolescents, or families.

Dr. Hansen currently works with three McNair Scholars: Michelle Haikalis, Alyssa Lundahl, and Mollie Dittmer (pictured), and has worked with former Scholar and current Ph.D. student in the Clinical Psychology program at University of Memphis, Tara Cossel.

As a first generation college student at Creighton University, Dr. Hansen cites his professor of abnormal psychology as the mentor who helped him to understand the graduate application process, expectations for graduate students, and research in general by providing him with research experiences. As a graduate student at the University of Mississippi (where he received a master's degree and his Ph.D. in clinical psychology), he had his first mentorship role. His work with undergraduates fueled his pursuit of a career in academia.

Dr. Hansen views undergraduate research as highly valuable because it helps "build upon knowledge and skills that are developed in courses, including knowledge of scientific methods, critical thinking, writing, data collection and data analysis." He continued, "It may also help students decide if a career in academia and research is the right choice for them."

"Being involved in a research lab is a great way to get to know and be mentored by faculty and graduate students – which often goes beyond the immediate research issues and includes broader professional development," Hansen added, "and, of course, it helps in getting those valuable letters of recommendation!"

With his McNair mentees, other undergraduates, and graduate students, Dr. Hansen takes a very serious and invested approach to his mentorship. "Mentors for undergraduate students should be accessible and able to readily provide research opportunities," he affirmed. "Mentors should be encouraging and supportive, good listeners and interested in the student's broader education and development."

As a McNair mentor, Dr. Hansen wants to provide students a valuable opportunity and help them progress through the rapid pace of the summer research experience – developing and writing a proposal, gathering data, doing data analyses, and preparing a final paper, presentation, and poster.

In regard to her Summer Research Experience in Dr. Hansen's lab, Mollie Dittmer stated, "Dr. Hansen is always readily available to help with any questions I have had regarding the research process and graduate school process. He has always been willing to discuss options in my research and has been willing to take in my opinions for what I wanted to do."

Dr. Hansen has high, yet reasonable, expectations of his undergraduate mentees. Students should "be motivated and excited about opportunities to learn, take initiative, have good time-management skills, and be open to suggestions and feedback." His mentees are

not only expected to come forth with questions and updates, but are expected to understand that they are in charge of their progress and achievements.

He encourages them to focus on broader professional development issues and consider other kinds of experiences that may be valuable, such as clinical or other applied experience, honors thesis, UCARE research, and conference presentations.

Michelle Haikalis asserted, "By giving me opportunities to present research at national conferences and work as a co-therapist for Project SAFE, he helped me to become more confident in my abilities as a researcher and future clinician. I would not be as prepared or as developed in my research interests without his support."

Dr. Hansen also seeks to help students when applying to graduate school by assisting them with their curriculum vitas, personal statements, and preparation for interviews.

Alyssa Lundahl confirmed, "Despite his very busy schedule, Dr. Hansen continues to meet regularly with me and respond to my e-mails (usually within the hour) regarding my research project and the graduation school application process."

Graduate student Tara Cossel remarked, "Dr. Hansen not only helped me as I prepared and applied for graduate school; after I started my program, he has continued to be interested in my academic career and has given me invaluable advice in working with a mentor in graduate school and choosing an advisor." Tara reiterated the feelings of Dr. Hansen's other mentees saying, "I've been incredibly fortunate to learn from him."

Having successfully mentored four Scholars through the McNair Summer Research Experience, Dr. Hansen is proud of their continual development. "I enjoy seeing them grow and succeed, and have some fun and positive experiences along the way."



David Hansen with McNair mentees – Pictured (left to right): Mollie Dittmer, Dr. Hansen, Alyssa Lundahl, and Michelle Haikalis.

**Special Thanks** to the faculty, postdoctoral and graduate student mentors who contributed their time and expertise to work with McNair Scholars during the 2011 McNair Summer Research Experience and who continue to support their research and graduate application efforts.

# Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Mentors

## Welcome to the 2011-12 McNair graduate student and postdoctoral mentors!

They include: Morgan Conley, counseling psychology; Grant Boardman, paleontology; Mike Gruszczynski, political science; Mamur Hossain, mechanical engineering; Grace Hubel, psychology; Leslie Martinez, social psychology; Brett Sallach, civil engineering; and Tiffany West, psychology. They join continuing graduate mentors: Ashley Barnett, geography; Stephanie Kennedy, sociology; Elaine Martin, psychology; Owen O'Reilly, anthropology; Jenna Perkins, psychology; and Seung-Woo Lee, chemical engineering.

## Scholar Publications

McNair Scholars co-authored several recent publications, including:

**Misam Ali** & Carleen Sanchez. (2011) Debt Relief or Debt Cycle: A Secondary Analysis of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative in African Nations. *The McNair Scholars Research Journal*. University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

**Mollie Dittmer**, Grace Hubel, & David J. Hansen. (2011) Factors Associated with Participation and Retention in a Group Treatment for Child Sexual Abuse. *The McNair Scholars Research Journal*. University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

**Alyssa Lundahl**, Tiffany West, Elaine K. Martin, Christopher Campbell, Jayci Vanderbeek, & David J. Hansen (2011). Relationship of Obsessive-Compulsive Behaviors of Primary Caregivers with a History of Sexual Abuse and Perfectionism in their Sexually Abused Children. *The McNair Scholars Research Journal*. University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

## Scholars Receive 2011-12 UCARE funding

Through the Undergraduate Creative Activities and Research Experiences (UCARE) program, McNair Scholars receive additional support that allows them to remain engaged in a research project with their faculty mentors. UCARE is funded by the Pepsi Endowment and Program of Excellence funds. The following McNair Scholars received UCARE awards for 2011-12:

Scholar	Research Project and Faculty Sponsor
Reinaldo Alcalde	First Year Award, <i>Approach Velocity and Discharge Measurements in a Combined Weir and Sluice Gate Structure</i> , Faculty sponsor: Dr. David Admiraal, Civil Engineering
Ross Benes	First Year Award, <i>Alcohol Skills Training Program</i> Faculty sponsor: Dr. Dennis McChargue, Psychology
Mollie Dittmer	First Year Award, <i>Factors Associated with Participation and Retention in a Group Treatment for Child Sexual Abuse Victims and Their Parents</i> , Faculty sponsor: Dr. David Hansen, Psychology
Michelle Haikalis	Second Year Award, <i>Factors Influencing Child Sexual Abuse Victims' Externalizing Behaviors: A Multivariate Analysis</i> , Faculty sponsor: Dr. David Hansen, Psychology
Arianne Holland	Second Year Award, <i>Aging and the Nature of the Objectifying Gaze</i> Faculty sponsors: Dr. Mike Dodd and Dr. Sarah Gervais, Psychology
Brittany Jones	Second Year Award, <i>Civil War Washington Project</i> Faculty sponsor: Kenneth Winkle, History
Kaitlin Leslie	Second Year Award, <i>Determining Error Rates for Angle of Impact of Bloodstains in Relation to Surface and Measurement Tool</i> , Faculty sponsor: Dr. David Carter, Entomology
Nathan Lilienthal	First year Award, <i>Did Climate Affect Body Size Trends in Pleistocene Horses?</i> Faculty sponsor: Dr. Ross Secord, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences
Jeff Lopez	Second Year Award, <i>Fundamental Studies and Application of Electrochemical Reactions</i> Faculty sponsor: Dr. Ravi Saraf, Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering
Alyssa Lundahl	Second Year Award, <i>Examination of Problematic Behaviors in Head Start Children: An Evaluation of the Efficacy of Teacher-Child Interaction Training (TCIT)</i> , Faculty sponsor: Dr. David Hansen, Psychology
Christian Padilla	First Year Award, <i>Motion Generation Using Straight Line Mechanisms</i> Faculty sponsor: Dr. Carl Nelson, Mechanical & Materials Engineering

# What I Tell My Graduate Students

By Lennard J. Davis

In my mind, there is no doubt that an important part of my job is to make sure my graduate students get their own jobs. What that means is talking the turkey of job placement as soon as they walk in my door and tell me they want to do a Ph.D.

First I inform them of the current job situation, whatever that is at the time. I don't sugarcoat the dismal nature, say, of today's academic market. But I also say that I have had very good success in placing my graduate students. Then I make it clear that the first thing they need to do is start thinking about the minimum requirements for going on the job market.

They often look a little stunned to be getting a lecture about professional development when they have just come in to ask me if I'll be on their master's-thesis defense. But I think it's not just the early bird who gets the worm; it's the very, very early bird.

The next thing I do is set the bar for the minimum requirements in my field. To even get into the race, I tell students, you need three published articles, two or three book reviews, attendance and paper presentation at professional conferences, and, ideally, a contract for the publication of the dissertation.

I emphasize the need to have a geological sense of time when it comes to academic publication. The turnaround from submitting an article to its publication can be a year or two, if you are lucky. So to have three articles published, you need to start as soon as possible.

I point out that book reviews, which don't count anywhere near as much as an article, are relatively easy to do and quicker to get published. Students should just look at the journals in their field, turn to the back pages, where the journal will often list "books received," and write a letter on department stationery asking to review a relevant book.

I tell my students to plan their dissertation committees with the job search in mind. They should pick professors who not only are skilled in the field of the dissertation, but who also have national and international reputations. Letters from those professors will count a great deal. And as these things go, letters from full professors will count more than letters from associate professors, and so on down the line.

I advise students to attend professional conferences for a number of reasons. First, there is the inevitable networking, which helps you not only now but also later in your career. Second, by attending sessions at the conference, students can learn the latest scholarly insights circulating well before the publication of those ideas (which will take those glacial several years of research and publication that I mentioned). So attending a conference can be a way of looking into the crystal ball in your field to see what the future will bring. Third, the book exhibits of such professional organizations will let students browse the newest texts and even unpublished page proofs before the material is filtered through the review mill and enters the consciousness of scholars and critics.

Another important reason to attend professional conferences is that often the editors of presses are there looking for new books to publish. Students always seem surprised to think that editors are eagerly looking for new books rather than shooing people away from their stalls. Getting to know those editors, and even pitching a book idea to them, is an important part of career development.

I normally attend the Modern Language Association

convention, and I will literally walk my students through the exhibits and introduce them to editors I think might be interested in their work. I consider that assistance to be a crucial part of my job as a mentor. If the editors publish their books, those students will get and keep a job. If not, perhaps not. I remember one student who felt a bit embarrassed to be the chick to my mother hen in the aisles of the book exhibit, but she did end up getting a good book contract and a job.

Choosing a field and a topic also involves a strategic element. A student came to my office the other day telling me that he wanted to do his dissertation on physics and late-20th-century American literature. I told him, as I have told many others, to pick up a copy of the job list in our field and see, if he were applying this year with that topic, how many jobs would he be eligible for. He came back a bit sobered and decided to rethink his dissertation topic.

To some, that might seem to involve crass commercialism. Might not I be keeping a significant book or idea from seeing the light of day? Shouldn't we just nurture all good ideas and let the chaff fall where it may?

Perhaps, but I don't see students' lives as chaff. At the end of the academic day, having a job is really what should be the outcome of spending years in a Ph.D. program. You might have written the best and most provocative dissertation in the world, but if it didn't appeal to any job committees or employers, you could end up stocking the shelves at Barnes & Noble (not to disparage those who do that valuable work).

In terms of helping my students get their articles published, I suggest that they take any paper for which they received an A and expand it to article length. Then I go over possible academic journals, often ones whose editors I know, and tell them to send the article along with a mention of my name.

I also advise my students to write out an envelope with the address of another likely publication at the same time as they send off the first one. When, and if, the article comes back with a nice rejection note, I tell them to rewrite the piece, if there are any suggestions, and stick the revised essay in the already addressed second envelope. Quick turnaround is fair play. There should be no shame or hesitation in sending out a good article, even if it has been rejected. Tastes vary, opinions fluctuate, and each publication has a feeling of the right fit for it. Keep addressing the next envelope in advance.

When the dissertation is done and passed, I welcome the student into the ranks of professorship, and then I ask to see the letter of application, the CV, the writing sample, the statement of teaching philosophy, and anything else sent out to a job-search committee.

I work with them on their letters, making sure they highlight and, yes, "sell" themselves and their special qualifications.

I've noticed that many graduate students are shy about pushing their unique qualities and often hide their lights in dull letters of application. Others can be too brash, of course, and so it helps to go over their materials with them.

That kind of mentorship is good not only for students, but for faculty members as well. I feel closer to my students and more involved in their fates. And that allows me to be happy when they tell me that they have, in fact, gotten a job.

Which is a job well done for all.

# Alumni News: Advanced Degrees

Congratulations to these alumni who earned advanced degrees during 2011-12:

## Doctoral and Professional degrees

**Potso Byndon** earned his Juris Doctorate from North Carolina Central University's School of Law in May 2011.

**Uyen Chu** earned her Ph.D. in pharmacology, with a specialization in molecular and cellular pharmacology, from the University of Wisconsin in May 2011. She currently is a postdoctoral fellow working with Jay Yang, Department of Anesthesiology, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**Deonna Foster-Cox** earned her Ed.D. in curriculum and instruction from the University of Memphis in August 2011.

## Master's degrees

**Joshua Alvarez** earned his master's degree in higher education leadership at the University of Maryland, College Park, in May 2011.

**Rebecca Beals** earned her master's degree in sociology from the University of New Mexico (UNM) in May 2011. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in sociology at UNM, focusing on higher education stratification.

**Martin Diaz** earned his master's degree in electrical engineering in July 2011. He's currently pursuing his Ph.D. in the area of high performance solar cells at the University of Delaware.

**Phuoc Nguyen** earned his master's degree in biological sciences from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in May 2011.

**Marco Ramirez** earned his master's degree in counseling psychology from California State Fullerton in December 2010.

**MinJeong Schneider** earned her master's degree in chemical engineering from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in August 2011.

**Morrel (Mo) Wax** earned his master's degree in student affairs from the University of Central Missouri in May 2011.

# McNair by the Numbers

Since the McNair Scholars Program began at UNL in 1995, it has served **216** students. Of those, **195** – or **90.3 percent** – have earned bachelor's degrees. **Eighty-seven** alumni have gone on to earn master's degrees; **18** have achieved doctoral degrees, and **9** have earned professional and other degrees. Currently, **26** UNL McNair alumni are enrolled in Ph.D. programs, **16** are actively pursuing master's degrees, and **6** are pursuing professional doctorates.

### McNair Alumni

Please keep us informed about your academic progress.

You may update your information at anytime: <http://www.unl.edu/mcnair/scholarupdate.shtml>



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