Scholars Encouraged to Work Hard and Stay Connected

At the 2013 McNair Scholars Recognition Reception on Friday, April 26, we honored our graduating seniors, as well as those who make the McNair Program at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln truly outstanding. Emcee for the event was McNair Scholar Kenneth Herron.

An inspirational message was presented by McNair alumnus Masoud Mahjouri Samani, who shared his experiences as an immigrant from Iran, an undergraduate UNL McNair Scholar, and then as a successful graduate student.

While attending technical high school in Iran, Masoud focused on electrical subjects because he enjoyed the multidisciplinary nature of this field where physics, mathematics, and material science meet. Because of his religious beliefs, he was denied an advanced education, so at the age of 20 he immigrated to the United States. The first hurdle he faced was to learn English, which he did in short time by taking Intensive English Program classes at UNL.

As an undergraduate electrical engineering major at UNL, Masoud learned of the McNair Program through his wife, Sahar Hasim, a biological sciences major. Masoud applied, was accepted to the program, and began to conduct research with Dr. Yongfeng Lu in the Department of Electrical Engineering.

Masoud Mahjouri Samani, Ph.D.  UNL McNair Scholar 2006-08

Masoud was a McNair Scholar from 2006-2008, and earned his bachelor’s in electrical engineering in May 2008. He was accepted to the electrical engineering Ph.D. program at UNL for Fall 2008, and continued his research with Dr. Lu.

Masoud encouraged the Scholars embarking on the McNair Summer Research Experience to “Take it very seriously. The foundation of your future career might be established at this stage.”

In closing, Masoud thanked the McNair Staff for their continued support of his endeavors long after he graduated from the program. He urged the Scholars to work hard and stay connected with the program. He emphasized, “You have all the resources available to get your Ph.D., so use them.”

Dr. Mahjouri Samani proudly earned his Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering on May 3. He secured a Postdoctoral Research Associate position at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee, which he began on May 6.

On a related note, Sahar Hasim will earn her Ph.D. in biological sciences in August 2013.

In a follow-up conversation, Masoud mentioned he was able to complete his Ph.D. in 3 years because he had a very clear set of goals and worked tirelessly towards his dream of being a faculty member at a university. Masoud advised, “Time will pass whether you like it or not. Use your time wisely and plan for your future. No fear now, no regret in the future.”

Congratulations to Masoud and Sahar on their accomplishments!

McNair Mentors Honored for Contributions

The support of our faculty, postdoctoral, and graduate student mentors are critical to the success of the UNL McNair Scholars Program. At the annual McNair Recognition Reception, awards were presented to a faculty member and a graduate student who have made significant contributions to the McNair Scholars Program and to our Scholars.

Dr. Melanie Simpson, Associate Professor of Biochemistry, received the 2013 McNair Faculty Appreciation Award. In presenting the award, Dr. Laurie Bellows noted that Dr. Simpson has mentored five McNair Scholars, and has twice served as a guest speaker at the McNair Scholars Orientation, sharing her story as a first-generation college student who persevered to complete her Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota. Scholars describe her as inspiring and passionate about research, noting how both qualities have helped them learn how to be better scientists. Brooke Micek said, “Her ability to show enthusiasm and meaning in each task presented has been most helpful to me”.

McNair alumn Katie Haferbier, a doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska Medical Center noted, “Dr. Simpson was a wonderful mentor, and it was in her lab I found my interest in research. Her guidance and mentorship gave me the tools to be a successful graduate student.”

The 2013 McNair Graduate Student Appreciation Award recipient was Mamur Hossain, a doctoral candidate in Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics. Mamur’s mentees noted that he has been a good friend and an even better mentor, taking them to lectures and seminars, introducing them to graduate school life, and the many research areas available in graduate school.

Joseph Tran remarked, “Mamur has been with me every step of the way while I learned to conduct research. His feedback has always been constructive and included great words of motivation.”

Dr. Bellows thanked all the McNair faculty, postdoctoral, and graduate student mentors for their support and encouragement of our Scholars throughout the research process and preparation for later success in graduate school.
Rei Alcalde Awarded NSF Fellowship

Reinaldo Alcalde has been awarded a 2013 National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP), a highly competitive award reserved for outstanding students pursuing research-based graduate degrees.

For the 2013 competition, the NSF made 2,000 award offers from the over 13,000 applications received. The GRFP award also offers professional development opportunities through 5-12 month international research collaborations.

Rei, a UNL McNair Scholar from 2010 – 2013, conducted his 2011 McNair Summer Research project under the guidance of Dr. David Admaidaal from the Department of Civil Engineering.

In 2012, Rei applied to the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP) and was accepted to work with Dr. Charles Werth, Professor and Associate Head of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

In Fall 2010, the UNL McNair Scholars Program published its first edition of 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, a website hosted by the UNL Libraries that aims to bring together and store all of UNL's research under one umbrella.

As of May 2013, articles from the MSRI had been downloaded 2,802 times. In February 2013 alone, articles from MSRJ had 131 full-text downloads. The top downloaded articles in February - May 2013 were:


On Facebook – The UNL McNair program created a Facebook page to facilitate communication between current McNair scholars and alumni. Current scholars can use Facebook to connect with one another and develop a stronger sense of community. Alumni can provide valuable insights for our current scholars and keep us up-to-date on their successes. Look for UNL McNair next time you log into Facebook!
Honor’s, Awards, and Leadership Activities 2012-13

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 a partial listing of their campus and community involvement:

Bridge Agnew – OASH Certificate of High Scholarship; UCARE award; Dean’s List; Student Support Services sociology tutor; Sociology 407/807 proctor; Behavioral Research assistant; Bureau of Sociological Research and Dr. Julia McQuillan’s student worker; Omaha Family Stress and Health Study research assistant; W.E. DuBois Honor Society; and African Student Association.

Reinaldo Alcalde – NSF Graduate Fellowship award recipient; Honors Program; and 2012-13 UCARE Award.

Emmile Baker – UCARE award (2012-13 and 2013-14); research assistant in Dr. Debra Hope lab and Dr. Sarah Gervais Subtle Prejudice lab; and Brentwood Estates volunteer.

Ross Bena – Susan Thompson Buffett Scholarship; Phi Chi University; international students’ conservation partner; Lincoln Literacy volunteer English instructor; and ASW wildlife biologist in Amesworth, Nebraska.

Janice Castillo-Barranza – 2013-14 UCARE Award; William H. Thompson Learning Community member and mentor; and Harley Hemervy Tutor.

Maggie Goossen Schauer – Graduated with Distinction; Honors Program; Regents Scholarship; 2012-13 UCARE Award; 2013 Levine Diversity Research Enhancement Award; 2012-2013 Jensen Award for the best undergraduate research project; Society for Personality and Social Psychology; Society for Industrial-Organizational Psychology; President- Dr. Lisa W. Undergraduate Psychology Organization; Tau Sigma transfer student honors society; and President/Cofounder of Individuals’ Commitment to the Achievement of Non-traditional (I.C.A.N.)

Eric Harnes – Graduated with Distinction; Dean’s List; undergraduate teaching assistant for PSYC 101 Career Planning for Psychology Majors; F.R. Sturgis Psychology Award; American Psychological Association; Student Affiliate: Psi Chi Honors Society; Child Maltreatment and Interpersonal Violence Special Interest Group; Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT); and Individuals’ Commitment to the Achievement of Non-traditional (I.C.A.N.) - Vice President/President- Dr. Sandra Kim

Jackie Hernandez – 2013-14 UCARE Award and Nebraska College Preparatory Academy Scholarship.

Erandi Herndon – Honors Program, 2013-2014 UCARE Award; Celebration of Excellence ceremony; UNL Honors Convocation; 2013-2014 UCARE Award; Dean’s List; Awards of Academic Excellence; NS Convocation Nebraska Achievement Scholarship; Schramm Hall Resident Assistant; Lambda Theta Nu Sorority; and Monocan American Student Association.

Kenneth Herren – 2012-13 UCARE award; Howard and Judy Van Student Leadership Award; 2013 McNair Recognition Reception awardee; OASH Student Advisory Board; McVic Jones Learning Community mentor; Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Funding Review Committee; and Camp Kearns co-chair.

Nathan Lifshitz – UCARE Award (2011-12 and 2012-13).

Brooke Miarka – UCARE award (2012-13); Success Scholarship; Simpson Lab research assistant; Society for Women Engineers; Alpha Lambda Delta and Phi Eta Sigma Honor Society.

Dina Morales – 2013-14 UCARE Award and the Susan Thompson Buffett Scholarship.

Ivana Moreno – UCARE Award (2012-13 and 2013-14); Dean’s List; Dewey & Kelley Scholarship; William L. Biehl Scholarship; William H. Thompson Scholar; and Chemistry Club Treasurer.

David Pacheco – 2013-14 UCARE Award; Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers Treasurer; Sigma Lambda Beta International Fraternity; Hispanic American Student Association Vice-President; Multicore Center/Centro de las Americas Golden Warriors Mentoring Program; and Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers Future.

Moses Pacheco – 2012-13 UCARE Award; Outstanding Student Leadership Award Finalist; OASIS Academic Recognition; Honors Program; Homecoming Royalty; Chi Epsilon Honors Society; W.E. DuBois Honor Society; Nebraska Achievement Scholarship; Beta Tau Delta Tau Delta Scholarship; American Society of Civil Engineers; Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers USL Student Chapter; Sigma Lambda Beta Fraternity; Community Service Chair; Mexican American Student Association; and Roads, Rails, and Race Cars After School Program introduction to transportation engineering mentor for middle school student.

Christian Padilla – UCARE Award (2011-12 and 2012-13).

Nina Quiniones – UCARE Award for 2012-13; W.E. DuBois Honor Society; and Mexican American Student Association.

Olivia Reinert Gehman – Regents Scholarship; Honors Program; 2013-14 UCARE Award; Lidia G. Porterman Psychology Scholarship; Secretary of Phi Sigma Pi Honors Fraternity; and Vice President of Psi Chi Psychology Honors Society.

Eric Reis – 2013-14 UCARE Award; Earth & Atmospheric Sciences Honors; 2013-14 UCARE Award; Lincoln G. Porterman Psychology Scholarship; and George and Mary Haskell Scholarship; and National Society for Leadership and Volunteers in Medicine.

Elisa Soto – 2013-14 UCARE Award; Research Assistant UNL Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience lab; Kenneth Randall Scholarship; and Giving Thanksgiving Food Volunteer for Center for People in Need.

Jason Thomas – UCARE Awards (2012-13 and 2013-14); Honors Program; UC/CRSSS Scholars Program; Nebraska Education Board; W.E. DuBois Honor Society; and People’s City Mission volunteer.

Joseph Tran – UCARE Awards (2012-13 and Summer 2013); Engineering Librarian Assistant, UNL Biomedical Engineering Society, and Academic Competitiveness Grant.

Alaysia Yates – 2013-14 UCARE Award; Dean’s List; Humanities in Medicine treasurer and executive committee; Lincoln Humane Society volunteer; George and Mary Haskell Scholarship; and National Society for Collegiate Scholars.

Graduate School Path Takes Diaz to Australia

When Martin Diaz accepted an admission offer to the electrical engineering Ph.D. program at the University of Delaware in 2009, he never imagined that his doctoral program would lead him to Australia.

In September 2011, when his advisor, Dr. Allen Barnett took a position at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney, Martin was given the choice of staying at Delaware and working with his co-advisor or transferring to UNSW to continue his program under Dr. Barnett.

After completing his Ph.D. qualifying exam and becoming a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Delaware, he attended UNSW for a semester before he made his final decision to transfer there to complete his doctoral degree.

Reflecting on his time as a McNair Scholar, Martin said he felt prepared for graduate study and felt significantly more prepared than his peers because of the guidance he received from the McNair Program. He noted, “The research experience I gained through the McNair Program prepared me for my graduate program at Delaware, which in turn prepared me for my graduate program at UNSW.” Martin added, “I’ve felt one step ahead throughout my postgraduate experience.”

“During my undergraduate experience I never would have predicted that I would be pursuing a Ph.D. in Australia. Martin is pursuing his Ph.D. in the area of high performance solar cells at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia.

Alumni News: Advanced Degrees

We applaud these UNL McNair alumni who earned advanced degrees during 2012-13:

Doctoral degrees

Masoud Mahjouri Samani (McNair Scholar 2008-08) earned his Ph.D. in engineering from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in May 2013. He has accepted a Postdoctoral Research Associate position at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

Sahar Hasim (McNair Scholar 2008-08) will complete her Ph.D. in biological sciences from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in August 2013. Sahar has secured a Postdoctoral Research Associate position at the University of Nebraska beginning September 1, and she will be working with Dr. Todd Reynolds in the Department of Microbiology.

Master’s degrees

Karie Carillo (McNair Scholar 2009-11) earned her master’s degree in criminal justice from the University at Albany–SUNY in December 2012. She is pursuing her Ph.D. in criminal justice at Albany, with a focus on comparative criminology of violence.

Morgan Conley (McNair Scholar 2008-10) earned her master’s degree in counseling psychology from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in May 2013, and is pursuing her Ph.D. program at UNL.

Alan Goyzueta (McNair Scholar 2009-11) earned his master’s degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in May 2013. Alan has accepted a position with Siemens in the Kansas City metro area.

Michael Harpster (McNair Scholar 2008-10) earned his master’s of architecture degree from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in May 2013. He has secured a position with Sinclair Hille Architects in Lincoln, Nebraska.
Making the Most of Research Conferences

by Alyssa Lundahl

Attending research conferences as an undergraduate or graduate student is one of the best ways for industrial researchers in your field of study, get ideas for future research, and cultivate a professional presence. Research conferences can also be somewhat overwhelming, however. With thousands of people in attendance and a jam-packed schedule, being organized is essential. Follow the tips below to become a successful conference attendee.

Before the Conference:
1. Read the conference program to become familiar with the topics and speakers. Determine which poster sessions and/or symposiums you want to attend and record the names of those presenters you wish to speak with. By carefully reviewing the program and identifying the topics and speakers of greatest interest, you can begin to construct an agenda for each day of the conference in order to most effectively make use of your time.
2. Review articles or books written by speakers and write down specific questions about how they conducted their research. It is always a good idea to have questions prepared ahead of time. If your questions are not relevant to the larger audience (e.g., it relates to your personal research), you can ask them privately at the end of the session.
3. Bring your McNair business cards with you (at least 50). Keep your business cards simple. They should include your name, affiliation, address, cell phone, and email address. Be sure to use a font and type size that is easy to read.
4. Practice how you will introduce yourself. A good introduction consists of a 30-second blurb about you and your research. It may also be useful to practice shaking hands to ensure that your handshake is neither too weak nor too strong. You want to make sure that your first impression will be a favorable one.
5. Dress professionally and appropriately. It is impossible to keep conference room temperature settings comfortable for everyone. Prepare for fluctuating temperatures by wearing lightweight clothing and keeping a sweater or jacket with you. Check the weather in the convention city before leaving home so you know how to pack.
6. Wear your nametag on the left side. Then, when you shake hands, you can easily identify who. Do not take the nametag off until you are back in your hotel room for the night.
7. Plan your meals. Lighter meals during the day make it easier to remain awake during the sessions.
8. Arrive at each session early enough to get the seat of your choice.
9. Attend as many conference social functions as you can.
10. Keep your cell phone in your hotel room to avoid unnecessary distractions or turn it off.
11. While waiting for the session to begin, look through any handout materials and highlight topics you want to hear more about. Review the introduction prepared before the conference. By knowing what to listen for, you will listen more intently.
12. Check the program addendum. Often there are speaker changes, additions, or room changes.
13. Ask for business cards. As soon as you are given someone’s card, write something distinctive about that person on the back of the card. This will give the card some meaning when you empty your pocket or bag at the end of the day.
14. Start conversations. Don’t be shy! Speak to anyone wearing a nametag or with whom you simply want to maintain a professional relationship.
15. While waiting for the session to begin, look through any handout materials and highlight topics you want to hear more about. Review the introduction prepared before the conference. By knowing what to listen for, you will listen more intently.
16. Plan your departure. With hundreds of conferees checking out of the hotel and booking flights, times and prices can be high and fluctuating. Finding alternative restaurants can save you money. It’s usually helpful to also find a safe drug store near the hotel to purchase last minute necessities.
17. Pack a box of protein bars or a bag of nuts. It’s always a good idea to have a mini-meal available at all times!
18. Go to the orientation session. Not only will this session welcome you to the conference, but will provide you with tips on how to navigate the program booklet and conference, as well as serve as your first networking opportunity.
19. Take notes or carry a voice recorder for recording your own thoughts. A voice recorder is great for instant note-taking and will be an invaluable memory jogger when you return home. Find a quiet spot immediately after a session to record a summary of what you learned from the session. A brief summary in your own words will be more useful than a recording of the entire session. A word of caution: speakers often request that taping of their presentations not be done.
20. Send thank-you notes or emails. Sending a short and specific thank-you note makes you stand out in the crowd and reinforces your introduction! Short follow-up notes to newly-made friends can result in life-long professional relationships.

Adapted from http://cnct.org

Scholars Share Research at Conferences

McNair Scholars reported their research at numerous local, regional, and national conferences.


