Welcome, 2019 McNair Cohort!

McNair Scholars Program
University of Nebraska–Lincoln
Fall 2019

Amyia Harris is a psychology major from Omaha, Nebraska and is conducting research with Dr. Jenna Finch, Department of Psychology.

Miguel Avila Garcia is a fisheries/wildlife & environmental science major from Bellevue, Nebraska and will be working with Dr. Dennis Ferraro, Natural Resources.

Zoe Erickson is a biochemistry major from Blair, Nebraska and will be working with Dr. Srivatsan Kidambi, Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering.

Mahaa Albusharif is a biochemistry major from Lincoln, Nebraska and will be working with Dr. Mark Wilson, Department of Biochemistry.

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“True courage comes in enduring, persevering, and believing in oneself.”

- Ronald E. McNair, Ph.D.
During the McNair Summer Research Experience (MSRE), Scholars have the opportunity to explore their research topic under the guidance of a faculty mentor and to develop skills critical for success in graduate school. After successfully completing their MSRE projects, we ask the Scholars to reflect on what it means to be a McNair Scholar, as well as on their summer research experience and presenting at the National McNair Scholars Conference at UCLA. A sample of their remarks are included on the following pages.

**McNair Scholars Driven by Quest for Knowledge**

“I've taken advantage of the opportunities presented through my research experience to cultivate the skills that aren’t readily accessed in the classroom. To be a scholar means recognizing that ‘I get out what I put in.’ As a result, I’ve taken more seriously my personal responsibility in planning my graduate career, including taking the initiative to network and inform my decisions along the way.” – Aleece Barnard

“This program has not only given me the tools to become a scholar but has also given me a better understanding of what a scholar means. To be a scholar is not just entirely about grades. It's about having that drive and the quest for knowledge and an understanding of topics in order to create change that would significantly contribute to society, especially for underrepresented groups.” – Baudelio Abrica

“There are a lot of ups and downs when it comes to research, however, if you keep your head up you can be successful with your research project. I learned a lot about myself this summer. The first being that research, specifically research that is close to me might be difficult to talk about. However, my research benefited people in communities with need, and I thought that was a great accomplishment.” – Nestor Hernandez

“MSRE prepared me in the best way to accomplish the minor and major milestones for my research project. Though I doubted myself numerous times, I accepted the challenges and began to set daily goals to accomplish. My growth as a researcher progressed and I take pride in what I have accomplished as a McNair Scholar.” – My-Linh Luc
Thank you to all of the faculty, postdoctoral, and graduate student mentors who contributed their time and expertise to work with McNair Scholars during the 2019 McNair Summer Research Experience and who continue to support the Scholars’ research and graduate application efforts. Your support is invaluable to the success of our program!
Congratulations to December 2019 McNair Grad!

Aleece Barnard, from Colorado Springs, Colorado, earned her bachelor’s degree in Civil Engineering in December 2019. She conducted her McNair research project with Dr. Christine Wittich from the Department of Civil Engineering on simulations of precarious rock systems to understand seismic hazards. Aleece has accepted an internship at Black & Veatch in Overland Park, Kansas and is looking forward to entering graduate school in Fall 2020.

2019-20 Postdoctoral & Grad Student Mentors

The McNair Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Mentoring Program offers our UNL McNair Scholars a supportive community, as well as advice, insight, and encouragement as they conduct research and prepare to enter graduate school. In turn, it offers our mentors a chance to gain experience mentoring a rising scholar associated with one of the nationally-recognized Department of Education TRIO programs.

We’d like to welcome the 2019-20 McNair postdoctoral and graduate student mentors! They include: Donna Chen, child, youth, and family studies; Mengzhu Fu, psychology; Ben Hage, biological systems engineering; and Amanda Miller, chemistry.

They join continuing graduate mentors: Jenn Andersen, sociology; Safiya Beckford, nutrition & health sciences; Marc Lussier, computer science & engineering; Alexandra Martin, nutrition & health sciences; Behrooz Motealleh, chemical & biomolecular engineering; Chaise Murphy, nutrition & health sciences; and Vincent Perez, biochemistry.

Since the UNL McNair Scholars Program began in 1995, we’ve served 306 undergraduates. Excluding the continuing Scholars, 97.8 percent have earned their bachelor’s degree. Forty-seven UNL McNair Program alumni have achieved Ph.D.s, 137 have earned master’s degrees, and 21 have earned professional degrees. Currently, 22 UNL McNair alumni are enrolled in Ph.D. programs, 7 are pursuing master’s degrees, and 2 are pursuing professional degrees.
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.

For the 2019-20 Academic Year, 10 UNL McNair Scholars received research funding from the Undergraduate Creative Activities and Research Experiences (UCARE) Program, as well as from the National Strategic Research Institute, and other departmental funding such as Undergraduate Sociology Teaching and Research (USTARS).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Project Title and Faculty Research Advisor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baudelio Abrica</td>
<td><strong>UCARE Project:</strong> Latino Youth’s Educational Adjustment: The Role of Ethnic Identity, Family Relations, and Familism Values. <strong>Faculty Advisor:</strong> Dr. Lorey Wheeler, Child, Youth and Family Studies</td>
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<td>Darius Fox</td>
<td><strong>UCARE Project:</strong> Urolithin A, A Gut Metabolite, and Its Effects on an in vitro Parkinson’s Disease model. <strong>Faculty Advisor:</strong> Dr. Soonkyu Chung, Nutrition &amp; Health Sciences</td>
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<td>Amyia Harris</td>
<td><strong>UCARE Project:</strong> Parental Support of Persistence and Challenge Preference during the Transition to Third Grade. <strong>Faculty Advisor:</strong> Dr. Jenna Finch, Department of Psychology</td>
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<td>Nestor Hernandez</td>
<td><strong>USTARS Project:</strong> Community Violence Exposures in Latinx Adolescence, Access to Care, and Well-Being Outcomes. <strong>Faculty Advisor:</strong> Lisa Kort-Butler, Ph.D., Department of Sociology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logan Miller</td>
<td><strong>UCARE Project:</strong> An Examination of Pop-Out in Dynamic Visual Search. <strong>Faculty Advisor:</strong> Dr. Mike Dodd, Department of Psychology</td>
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<td>Mark Nail</td>
<td><strong>National Strategic Research Institute Project:</strong> Unmanned Aerial System for Underground Sensor Installation. <strong>Faculty Advisor:</strong> Dr. Carrick Detweiler, Department of Computer Science &amp; Engineering</td>
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<td>Nancy Nguyen</td>
<td><strong>UCARE Project:</strong> Defining the Mechanism of Action of Plant Derived Polyacetylene Antifungal Compounds Biological Cells. <strong>Faculty Advisor:</strong> Dr. Wayne Riekhof, School of Biological Sciences</td>
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<td>Adan Redwine</td>
<td><strong>UCARE Project:</strong> Quantification of Phenotypic Changes Resulting in Sensitization of Primary Sensory Neurons due to Oxidative Stress. <strong>Faculty Advisor:</strong> Dr. Rebecca Wachs, Biological Systems Engineering</td>
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<td>Juliana Rodriguez</td>
<td><strong>UCARE Project:</strong> Artificial Emboli Verification and Discrimination in Cerebral Circulation: Increasing Sensitivity and Specificity of Embolic Detection via Transcranial Doppler Ultrasound. <strong>Faculty Advisor:</strong> Dr. Greg Bashford, Biological Systems Engineering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serigne Toure</td>
<td><strong>UCARE Project:</strong> Cross-Fertilization of SAT and CP Solvers. <strong>Faculty Advisor:</strong> Dr. Berthe Choueiry, Computer Science and Engineering</td>
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McNair Scholars disseminated their research findings at local, regional, and national conferences during Summer and Fall 2019.


More Regional and National Conference Presentations


**Logan Miller – Miller, L., Dodd, M. (2019, August). An Examination of Pop-out in Dynamic Visual Search. Poster presentation at the 2019 Nebraska Summer Research Symposium, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska.**


McNair Alumni Earn Advanced Degrees

Congratulations to these UNL McNair alumni who earned advanced degrees in August and December 2019!

**Doctoral degrees**

Michelle Haikalis, Ph.D. (McNair Scholar 2009-12) earned a master’s degree in clinical psychology in May 2014 from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and earned a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from UNL in August 2019. Dr. Haikalis is currently a NIAAA T32 postdoctoral fellow at the Brown University Center for Alcohol and Addictions.

Zachary Garfield, Ph.D. (McNair Scholar 2009-12) earned a master’s degree in anthropology from Washington State University (WSU) in May 2015 and a Ph.D. in anthropology from WSU in August 2019. Dr. Garfield is a postdoctoral research fellow at The Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse, France.

Jason Thomas, Ph.D. (McNair Scholar 2012-14) earned a Ph.D. in plant and microbial biology from the University of Minnesota in December 2019.

**Master’s and Specialist degrees**

Kaylor Caldwell (McNair Scholar 2013-2015) earned a master’s degree in counseling psychology from the University of Missouri-Kansas City in December 2019 and is pursuing a Ph.D. in counseling psychology at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Janeigh Castillo-Barraza (McNair Scholar 2012-2014) earned a master’s of education in May 2018 from the University of Georgia (UGA) and earned an Ed.S. degree from UGA in August 2019. Janeigh is a school psychologist at Gwinnett County Public Schools in Suwanee, Georgia.

Brianna McKay (McNair Scholar 2015-2017) earned a master’s degree in nutrition & health sciences from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in August 2019. Brianna is enrolled in the master of physician assistant studies program at Creighton University.

Kimberly Ruiz (McNair Scholar 2015-2017) earned a master’s degree in marriage and family therapy from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in August 2019. Kim is the Senior Assistant Director–Wellness Counselor for the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Nebraska College Preparatory Academy.

MaLeaha Semerad (McNair Scholar 2015-2017) earned a master’s degree in marriage and family therapy from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in August 2019. MaLeaha is a mental health therapist at Capstone Behavioral Health in Fremont, Nebraska.

McNair Scholars & Alumni: The McNair Scholars Program will be celebrating 25 years at UNL in 2020. If you would like to share any McNair memories or photos in the next newsletter, on social media, and/or on the McNair website, we encourage you to send those to Carol Boehler, cboehler2@unl.edu.