



# McNair Moments

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## IMPORTANT DATES

Spring Seminars will be held on Wednesdays from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m.

## CONGRATS!

To graduating Scholars  
**Jennifer Franklin**  
**Tiffany Guess**  
**Kim Johnson**  
**LaKisha Newby**  
**Denise Tarpley**

## FROM MCNAIR TO THE AMAZON

Three years ago many brochures were placed into my school mailbox, but none offered such hope quite like the Ronald E. McNair brochure. As I read over it, I realized that there was a program willing to give a person like me, a first generation high school graduate and college student, help in procuring a better future.

I jumped at the chance and was accepted into the program. At the time I was pursuing an unfulfilling major, aiming for a bit of job security upon graduation. Graduate school seemed risky and difficult, and from my perspective, I was already treading into some uncharted educational territory.

How could a person like me even consider delving further into the unknown? My anticipation and fear abated as the McNair staff guided me through many steps of not only professional, but also personal development.

Through McNair, I gained the self-confidence to not only pursue graduate school, but to drop my safety net major and pursue a childhood dream: anthropology. That decision took me into much greater uncharted territory than I could have imagined: the Amazon rainforest.

I was encouraged by my

mentor, Dr. Richard Pace, to participate in an ethnographic field school conducted in the Brazilian Amazon. Armed with Study Abroad funds, I knew this was an opportunity of a lifetime and that there was no better place to conduct a research internship. With Dr. Pace's guidance, I chose the topic of child labor.

The location was a small peasant community located on the Amazon River called Gurupá. There were no roads to the town, only boats up and

perience knowing where and what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

Although this has been my most recent research, I did receive guidance and instruction from Dr. Oscar Díaz during my first year in the McNair program. With both projects I have been able to present my research at six conferences, visit two graduate schools, and have one paper published.

The research I conducted in the Amazon has now turned into the topic of my Master's



A typical dwelling between the Amazon River and the rain forest.

down the river. The nearest city was 33 hours away, and the only language spoken was Portuguese. The tropical heat reached indexes of 106 degrees daily. I spent four weeks learning how to conduct ethnographic research and learning how to be an anthropologist.

I came away from the ex-

thesis and I will be returning to Gurupá to gather more field data this summer.

I am certain that McNair has given me an advantage, in addition to giving me the confidence to pursue an advanced degree, a childhood dream, and the courage to venture into the unknown. —Monte Hendrickson

## MCNAIR PHD CANDIDATES



Bethany Brent

Bethany Brent, a BS degree holder in interdisciplinary studies from MTSU in 2001, stayed on at the university to complete an MEd in administration and supervision two years later. She then headed north to a Big Ten school — the University of Wisconsin — where she's en route to a Ph.D.



Nathaniel Mills

Nathaniel Mills, who works as a therapist in a children's hospital for kids in crisis, is a third-year Ph.D. student at Lehigh University. He has now begun the dissertation process. He's helping pay his way through graduate school by playing music and by selling casino supplies.



Janet Awokoya

Janet Awokoya recently completed her Masters degree in International Education. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in minority and urban education at the University of Maryland, College Park. She thanks everyone under heaven (and in it) for their continued support.



Lauren Wright-Mayhew

Lauren Wright-Mayhew is earning her degree by degrees. She earned a Bachelor of Science at MTSU in 2001 and an MEd in mathematics education at the University of Georgia in 2003. She's still at Georgia, and with "bulldog" determination, is now working on her Ph.D.

## "HEY, WHY NOT?"

**H**ey, why not get paid to do what I love?" This was the first thought that came into my mind when I was told about the McNair program by my research mentor in the spring of 2003. I couldn't believe there was a program out there that would actually pay me to do research in my area.

When I applied and was accepted I went in with the attitude that this was just a way to get a paycheck. After a few weeks I realized how much more the program had to offer. They have GRE prep workshops, a computer lab, staff to help you with your graduate applications, and people who really do care about

your future.

The research I have done through the McNair program has increased my knowledge of lab work tremendously and was even accepted for publication in a scientific journal. This summer I was admitted to the University of Cincinnati's summer undergraduate research fellowship program.

This, as most all summer programs, was very



competitive, and it was the McNair research that I had done the previous summer that set me apart from other candidates. I had the chance to work in a cutting-edge lab, with a professor who is the best in her field. This too has given me an advantage over other applicants to Ph.D. programs. I recently submitted my graduate applications to schools, most of which are in the "top 10" for microbiology.

I truly feel that the experience and knowledge gained through the Ronald E. McNair program has been invaluable to my success as an undergrad and will contribute to my success as a graduate student and as a professional scientist. —*Tiffany Guess*

## THE BENEFITS OF BEING A MCNAIR SCHOLAR

**W**hat are the advantages of the MTSU McNair Scholars Program? Most of the scholars agree that the \$2600 stipend for doing a summer research internship was the main selling point for them.

However, most also agree that in the end, the money was only a nice benefit for doing something they love to do. For most MTSU McNair Scholars, the research itself becomes the most important benefit.

Those who are chosen as McNair Scholars get opportunities that most undergraduates do not have. Their research prepares them for graduate school. The research symposium,

where they present their research, gives them much needed practice making a scholarly presentation while still an undergraduate.

Some McNair Scholars even get to present their research at professional conferences with travel costs paid by the McNair program.

The benefits of being chosen as a McNair Scholar are more than just participating in research internships and presenting at conferences.

McNair Scholars attend weekly seminars each semester for one hour of credit. They learn valuable lessons and get practical advice about graduate school from guest speakers.

They also get GRE tutoring. And when it is time to take the GRE, Scholars are given a voucher to cover

the complete cost of the test.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of being a McNair Scholar is the prestige. Having the distinction of being a McNair Scholar is noticed by universities to which a scholar may apply to graduate school.

The MTSU McNair Scholars Program strives to increase the number of financially disadvantaged, first-generation or under-represented college students who pursue and eventually complete the doctoral degree.

The McNair Scholars Program creates a win-win situation by helping pave the way for promising students to reach their goals of becoming university professors, while at the same time increasing the diversity of college and university faculties. □

## THE MENTOR EXPERIENCE

When Sarah Vinson first walked into my office for advisement, I realized that she was an exceptional student. She displayed an unusual amount of confidence for an undergraduate and a determination to obtain her degree at Middle Tennessee State University.

As I worked with Sarah in two of her first courses in Communication Disorders, my first impression of her was strengthened.

Later that year, Sarah spoke with me about becoming a McNair Scholar and asked me to be her mentor. I was delighted to have the opportunity to work with Sarah, but was also a bit concerned about my responsibilities as a mentor.

A mentor is not simply an advisor or teacher working with a student on an independent study. Rather, it is someone who makes a personal commitment to the Scholar.

A mentor assists the student in designing and carrying out a research project while at MTSU, discusses the student's plans for graduate education, and shares his or her own experiences as an

academician. It requires time, especially during the summer months when students are working on their research projects.

During our first summer, Sarah and I discussed a number of potential research areas. I found out that, although Sarah was majoring in the field of Communication Disorders while at MTSU, her passion was to improve health delivery services for African Americans.



Sarah Vinson (left) and mentor Dr. Fischer

That provided a focus for many of our discussions and for her proposed research project. After presenting her proposal at the end of the first summer, Sarah collected and analyzed her data during the following school year and second summer. She is now working on her masters in Public Health.

As we looked at the research together, Sarah shared some of her own personal experiences. She was the youngest child in a large family and the first to pursue a college degree. While her family was supportive, few members understood her desire to pursue a bachelor's degree, and questioned Sarah's desire to come to Middle Tennessee.

Sarah has three young nieces of whom she is particularly fond, and is keenly aware of the pressures on them and the challenges facing them as they go through school. In many ways, Sarah has become a mentor to these three girls, spending time with them and encouraging them to obtain a good education.

I continue to admire and marvel at Sarah's perseverance and desire to pass on her experience to her nieces. Like any good teaching experience, mentoring provides an opportunity to influence one student who in turn will influence others. And, like any good teaching experience, the mentor learns as well! — *Dr. Rebecca Fischer*

## YOU ARE HOW YOU EAT

You are sitting down at a banquet table and it's so crowded you see one glass of water on your left and another one on your right. Which one do you reach for?

Or: You know to turn your coffee cup over if you don't want coffee. What if you don't want wine?

Or: The soup is hot. How do you deal with it?

There are times you may be faced with these questions – maybe during a dinner for potential job hires, you among them. You know you're being judged so you really want to make a good impression at the table.

Dr. Katie Kemp, marketing professor at MTSU, knows how to eat properly, and she showed McNair scholars how to do it recently at the McNair Etiquette Dinner. While everyone ate, she went from table to table, answering questions like those posed above.

So which drinking glass does Dr. Kemp recommend? The one on the right. She says that solids (like the bread on the bread plate) are always on your left and beverages are always on your right.

This is easy to remember because "left" starts with an "l" and the word "solids" contains an "l." "Right" starts with an "r" and "beverages" contains an "r."

And if you don't want wine? Do not turn your wineglass upside down, says Kemp. Sounds reasonable. The stem of the wineglass sticking up in the air would look ridiculous. So just wave your hand once over the top of the glass when the server approaches.

Soup too hot? Well, don't burn your tongue. Allow it to cool on its own without helping it along by blowing on it.

Katie Kemp also says not to stab your food (unless – presumably – it's still alive). That



Start with the smaller outer fork for the salad and work your way in, using the bigger inner fork for the main course. If there's a fork above the plate, save it for dessert.

means you have to balance those little cherry tomatoes on your salad fork if you choose to eat them. Choose not to.

If you lose that little tomato and it goes rolling across the table into the lap of someone who will be making a decision about your future, you'll feel as ridiculous as that wineglass stem looks sticking up in the air over there on your right. □

## McNAIR AT A GLANCE

The Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education under an annual TRiO grant and Middle Tennessee State University. The program was established at MTSU in 1999 and has served 55 students since that time. A total of 33 bachelors degrees and five masters degrees have been earned by scholars in the McNair program. Two-thirds of the scholars are first-generation (meaning neither parent has a bachelors degree) and low income, one-third are from groups presently under-represented in graduate education.

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## GROTESQUE IN NEW ORLEANS

My summer research concerning sublime and grotesque imagery in Gothic texts culminated at this year's PCAS (Popular Culture Association of the South) meeting in New Orleans on September 23-25. Funded by the McNair program, the research examined sublime and grotesque imagery in some of the classic Gothic and post Gothic texts of the 18th and 19th centuries, among them Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, and Edgar Allan Poe's short stories.

Under the guidance of my mentor, Dr. Linda Badley, the research provided me with a theoretical means to approach a contemporary popular culture text, namely Tim Burton's film, *Batman*: both in the conflict represented in the film between the Joker and Batman and in the gloomy setting of the metropolis, Gotham.

Presenting the study in a city like New Orleans was quite appropriate to the nature of the research. In fact, I could not have been in a better city to present a paper on the Gothic!

The title of my PCAS research was "Moustaching the Sublime: Grotesque Travesties in the Gothic." To complement the discussion of *Batman*, I drew not only on historical examples of the Gothic but also on the deconstructive elements of Dadaist work like Marcel Duchamp.

As a result of my experience at the conference and research with Dr. Badley, both of which McNair funded, I am looking forward to more research in more various and complex directions. — *Chris Pierce*



## LANORA PRESENTS

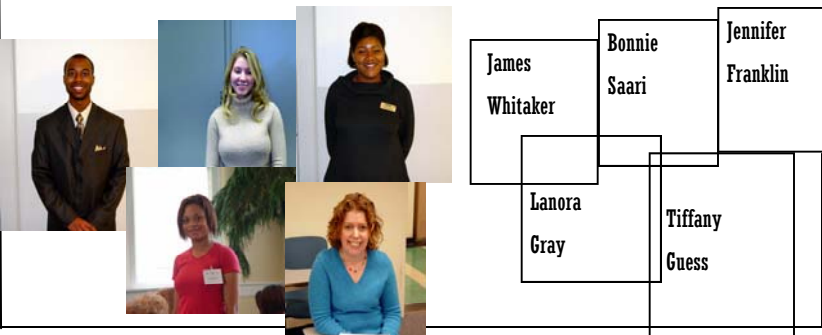
McNair Scholar LaNora Gray presented a poster about her research titled, "Hypertension: Impact and Management in Adults" at a symposium in Columbia, Missouri on November 12. The symposium, Access to Knowledge, featured presentations by undergraduate students in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines.

Workshops included such topics as Getting External Funding, Forming Collaborations, Managing Graduate School and Time Management. A highlight of the symposium was a keynote address by Dr. Calvin Mackie, winner of the 2003 Presidential Award for Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Mentoring. □



## URSCA PORTRAIT

URSCA (Undergraduate Research Scholarship and Creative Activity) makes awards varying from \$500 to \$3200 to promote student research during the academic year. Kudos to the five McNair Scholars who recently received URSCA awards.



## McNAIR STAFF

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