



*Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program  
University of Washington*

## UW McNair Scholars Excel in Research and Beyond

The McNair Program offers students the opportunity to carry out research projects in collaboration with a faculty mentor in their field of study. The goal of the program is to get students involved in the research enterprise at the undergraduate level, to enhance their analytical skills, academic sophistication, and confidence that will make them successful scholars in graduate school.

The following is a list of this year's UW McNair Scholars, the title of their research project and their faculty mentor (where applicable), and other major accomplishments and awards that they have received recently.

**Fitsum Abraha** was named a National Security Education Program (NSEP) David L. Boren Undergraduate Scholar.

**Penina Afereti** is conducting research on "Why are Samoans not in College? Evaluation of Social Justice Systems, Cultural Politics, and a Proposal for Change for the Seattle

Samoan Community." Faculty mentor: Dr. Rick Bonus, American Ethnic Studies.

**Rick Aguilar** conducted research this past summer entitled "Models of Response Following the Argentine Economic Crisis of 2001: Los Piqueteros, and the Neighborhood Popular Assemblies of Buenos Aires." Faculty mentor: Dr. Erik Wibbels, Political Science.

**Antonio Amado** participated in the Public Policy & International Affairs program last summer, and was elected the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers regional representative this year. He is conducting research on "Urban Planning: Amelioration of Walking Environments in Urban Space to Advocate Latent Public Health." Faculty mentor: Dr. Anne Vernez Moudon, Urban Planning and Design. He has been admitted to several PhD programs, including his top choice, MIT.

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## From the Director's Desk



We are delighted to bring you our third edition of the McNair Rocket! This year's publication, designed to further add to our students' wealth of informational capital, comes as we near the end of our sixth year of operation. These past six years have come and gone in a flash, but the seeds of our programmatic efforts continue to bear fruit through the growing number of students who are on the pathway to the doctoral degree. As such, we are pleased to report that thirty-one of our forty-three McNair graduates have successfully transitioned into masters or doctoral programs across the nation, as well as abroad. This year's graduating class continues to add to that actualized-advanced education legacy (see this edition for details). Additionally, several of our current McNair Alumni are also anxiously awaiting news of how they fared in this year's graduate school application process. Further yet, for the second year in a row, one of our McNair scholars has been named a Merage American

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## Benefiting from our Experience: Things we learned along the way



*Marc Philpart is a graduate student at the School of Public Affairs and School of Public Health. His professional goals are to work in the field of international development. His specific interests are in the alleviation of poverty and the elimination of health and educational disparities. Here, he writes about the benefits of*

*utilizing existing resources in the graduate school application process.*

During my freshman year of college, graduate school was unforeseeable. Getting through that year and adjusting to a new environment was enough to worry about. Graduate school and any other post graduation thoughts could wait—at least so I thought. Having looked up three years later, I realized that time had moved amazingly fast; yet I had moved quite slow in comparison. Graduation was imminent and my future was uncertain. I knew graduate study was something I wanted to pursue, but I had many unanswered questions. Which program of study is right for me? Do programs differ across universities? How so?

In the beginning, I struggled. Challenged by the logistical and substantive aspects of the application process, I found myself constantly coming up short. I needed help. Unafraid, I began to ask questions. I spoke with people from a variety of fields about general issues in

*"Graduation was imminent and my future was uncertain. I knew graduate study was something I wanted to pursue, but I had many unanswered questions. ...Seeking out assistance from those who are able and willing to provide it is key."*

graduate study and about what campus resources were available for students working on gaining entry into graduate programs. In the end, I received assistance from several campus programs. I built long-lasting relationships with people I worked intimately with as they helped me to pursue my goals. And most importantly, I was accepted by and subsequently enrolled in my school of choice.

The difference for me was in finding and utilizing these valuable campus resources. Through my affiliation with the McNair Program at Xavier University I was able to receive coaching throughout the application and planning processes and significant assistance on the construction of a competitive application packet. Recognizing the impact this small dedicated group of people made in my life, I decided to give back and do the same for others.

In the autumn of 2004, I joined the EIP (Early Identification Program)/McNair Program as a Graduate Student Adviser here at the University of Washington. Thus far, this position has been every bit as rewarding as I expected. In my short time, I have already shared a part in assisting several students to achieve their goals of entering graduate school. And after only a year removed from the process myself, it was ironic revisiting the application process again as a student this past quarter.

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### "Scholars," Continued from page 1

**Leslie Byrd II** has been a part of the Sensors, Energy, and Automation Laboratory (SEAL) Research group in the Electrical Engineering Department for several years. This last summer, he participated in the UW's STAR program in the Health Sciences.

**Brooke Clark** was awarded a Zesbaugh Scholarship by the College of Education. This year, she is conducting a research project entitled "What Constitutes a High School Senior: Defining a Senior to Study Attrition Rates" as a UW Presidential Scholar. She has been accepted to several Masters programs. Faculty mentor: Dr. Charles Hirschman, Sociology.

**Monique Franklin** is a dual major in Chemistry and Computer Science, using computer modeling as the primary tool for investigating scientific inquiries in further research. She is also the mother of a one year old baby girl.

**Ellen Harju** presented her research on "Laser-Induced Native Fluorescence Detection of Organic Molecules in Hydrothermal Vent Rocks" at the 2004 American Geophysical Union conference. She has also been elected to membership in Sigma Xi, received the Minority Sciences and Engineering Nation Initiative Scholarship, and has been accepted to Caltech's SURF program to conduct research at JPL this summer.

**Anne Kim** has just returned from South Africa where she has been conducting research on "Exploring the Intersection of Gender, Nationalism, and Racial Formation." Faculty mentor: Dr. Alys Weinbaum, English.

**Cindy Kim** has been awarded the Library Research Award for Undergraduates, the Mary Gates Training Grant, membership in Psi Chi, and was accepted into the UW Honor's

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## “Director’s Desk,” Continued from page 1

Dream Fellow. This year Eric Mvukiyehe earned the designation through this nationwide competition, whereas McNair alumnus Hoang Nhan (now a PhD student at UCSD) earned the designation last year. We are deeply proud of all of our students! As I’ve suggested in past editions, I know that we are making a difference in expanding the educational opportunities of students who have traditionally been left out of higher education. This is our challenge and we will continue to do this work with enthusiasm and energy. We hope and trust that you find the articles in this newsletter inspirational, as well as instructive. We welcome any and all feedback.

Sincerely, Dr. Gabriel Gallardo.

### Post-baccalaureate visions

Graduate and professional education.  
 Matriculation into the great...beyond...  
 These doors are...opportunity...  
 To walk through is to enter into a...unity...  
 In harmony are mind, text, and vision.  
 The formerly excluded have...risen...  
 From the margin, shift the...center...  
 Your gaze, it’s...revolutionary...  
 War against organized hypocrisy.  
 The academy houses the learned leader and the influential...fool...  
 Hardy decisions are daily...weighed...  
 Heavy on the mind is...justice...  
 For all our sakes, aspire to this higher level.  
 Ordinary lives expose what lies...ahead...  
 Strong winds of change ebb and...flow...  
 Chart your course of action; strengthen your...resolve...



Dilemmas are solved through advanced education.

Choose...and define your situation.

Dr. Steve Woodard, Associate Director  
 To appear in August 2005 issue of *Academic Exchange Extra*.

## Adjusting to the Culture of Grad School



Zakiya Adair is a fourth year graduate student in the department of Women Studies. Zakiya's area of interests include women's 20th century social history (broadly defined). Here, she writes about how she survived the first year of graduate school.

Within the context of painting a realistic picture of graduate school, my advice for surviving the first year and beyond is rooted in my personal experience. I want to start by stating that I am very happy with my decision to attend graduate school. I have been able to discover new intellectual boundaries and overcome difficult obstacles. However, my first year was a confusing labyrinth of meetings, course work, readings, course work, readings-did I mention readings? I was completely unhappy, disillusioned and paranoid. I was paranoid that someone was going to tap on my shoulder and inform me that a huge mistake had been made, revoke my academic pass, and promptly escort me off of the premises. Had someone explained to me the realities of graduate school before I arrived, life would have been easier.

Let me be very clear about this, graduate school is a time consuming academic boot camp. I was accepted on the pedestal of my undergraduate accomplishments, only to be knocked down once I entered into the “sacred” world of academia. I felt like an imposter, especially in my classes, where I felt like I was the only one who missed the prerequisite “foreign” language course. When speaking about a “foreign” language I am referring to a certain classroom politic that can occur in the graduate seminar courses. That classroom politic can often be the combination of students’ attempts to advance themselves by using big words and fancy convoluted language. The classroom politic is also the result of graduate students’ attempts to converse in the “new” language. During my first year I was in classes with advanced graduate students. This meant that I was in classes with people who seemed like they had been in a cave studying Foucault and Derrida.

In retrospect, this all seems a bit humorous. However, my first year was an intense experience and I do not think that I would have made it through without the guidance and encouragement of family, friends and academic mentors. On a more serious and far too common note I was also one of the only African American students in all of my classes. I often felt like an outsider and that my classroom contributions were assessed as “experiential” knowledge as opposed to informing theory. I offer this bit of background information not as a deterrent but as background context to my advice.

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## “Scholars,” Continued from page 2

Program. She is researching “Impact of Puberty on Family Relations: Effect of Early Pubertal Timing for Girls on Parent-Child Interactions and Levels of Cortisol and Estrodiol.” Faculty mentor: Dr. Sybil Carrere, Family and Child Nursing.

**Tess Lang** has been conducting research entitled “Determining Muller Glia Progenitor Potential.” Faculty mentors: Drs. Thomas Reh and Deepak Lamba, Biological Structures.

**Eric Mvukiyehe** is conducting research as a UW Presidential Scholar on “Measuring Success and Failure of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations in Intrastate Wars.” Faculty mentor: Dr. Erik Wibbels, Political Science. He has been admitted to several PhD programs, including Columbia and Princeton Universities. He has just been named a Merage American Dream Fellow.

**Jamie Northern** plans to spend this summer conducting malaria research. She is also pursuing a minor in dance, is

training as a scientific illustrator, and runs a community food bank out of her basement.

**Zawanblich Parker** is a senior double majoring in Electrical Engineering and Economics. His research interests involve the economic study of Power Generation Markets.

**William Peng** is conducting research entitled “From Export to Economic Growth: Understanding the Success or Failure of Export Processing Zones.” Faculty mentor: Dr. Matthew Sparke, Economics.

**Natasha Rivers** is conducting research on “Where Does the Abuse End? Domestic Violence and its Path to the Feminization of Poverty Affecting Black Women.” She has been accepted to multiple grad school programs, including U Chicago and UCLA. Faculty mentors: Dr. Suzanne Withers, Geography, and Dr. Patrick Lynn Rivers, AES and Law, Societies, & Justice.

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## Learning to Balance All Aspects of Your Life



*Alyson Brooks is a Ph.D. student in astronomy. Her research uses stars and computer simulations to trace the evolution of elemental/chemical abundances in the history of galaxies, in order to understand galaxy formation and the earliest stages of the Universe. Here, she writes about learning to manage her time while in grad school.*

The first couple years of graduate class work are a busy time. They require hard work and dedication, and often are only mentally acceptable with the knowledge that it will end soon and something better will come. And something better does come. This time last year, I was taking some of the hardest classes of my graduate career, beginning to study for my qualifying exam (five months before the actual test), and, as luck would have it, was having problems in my personal life that required my full attention two weekends each month. The loss of these weekends was particularly difficult, given the increase in my workload at the same time.

To survive this increase in pressure, I taught myself some of the basics of time management. I bought myself a personal calendar

that displayed an entire week at a time. I began by marking down the weekends that doing homework was out of the question and worked backwards to figure out what tasks I must accomplish each day in order to stay on schedule, often up to three weeks in advance. I included individual homework assignments, as well as personal tasks (like doing laundry). I also made sure to schedule in flexibility. When I knew I would be facing a particularly rough homework set, I would schedule in the bulk of time on a particular day to start it and do as much as possible, and schedule more time for it over the next few days so that I could ask questions about things that I didn't understand or discuss the problem with other grad students. In other words, **know how you work**. Don't assume you can finish everything in one day. Take into account the fact that you'd like to get a full night of sleep, and schedule your tasks so that you don't let things wait until the last minute. And most importantly, stick to the schedule! I didn't find it necessary to schedule down to the hour, but simply set a group of tasks that must be finished before going to bed that day. Thanks to this time management, I was able to stay on track during the most difficult quarter of grad school.

*“I discovered a new dilemma when school started this year... Since October, I have spent ten days in Chile, two weeks in Minneapolis, one week in San Diego, and four days in Las Vegas.”*

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## Life After Grad School: Making the Right Choice for You



*Rahel Bisetegna is a graduate student in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine. Her research interests focus on the following: 1) Health care disparities in immigrant populations 2) the educational and medical needs of the growing population of AIDS orphans in Africa. Here, she writes about facing life after her upcoming graduation.*

As I contemplated which path I would take after completing my masters in public health, it became apparent to me how complex the decision making process can be. All too often, we are faced with major decisions about our academic life and we are made to feel that these decisions are made in a context void of conflicting interests, but this is not the case.

To illustrate my point, let me give you some personal examples. During winter break, I had the privilege of visiting my parents and although I had imagined I would have the time to relax and not think about school for a while, the time turned into a planning session, of my future academic endeavors, by my parents. My parents focused their energy on developing not so tactful questions to try and determine what I intended to do after I completed the masters program in public health. All too frequently, I found myself in conversations, if you can call it that, in which each parent takes a turn asking a series of questions: what are you going to do after you graduate? What? You mean you're not going to continue on to get your doctorate? I thought you said you wanted to be a doctor? The answer I gave, since it was not

*In the minds of my parents and most of my friends the decision is easy: I need to stop wasting time and pursue a PhD!*

a decisive, "I'M GOING TO GET MY PhD", was followed by a remark from my father along the lines of, "You're wasting your time," and a glance from my mother expressing her irritation with my replies.

Although these conversations with my parents tend to echo in my mind, I have had similar conversations with friends. In the minds of my parents and most of my friends the decision is easy: I need to stop wasting time and pursue a PhD! These well-intentioned individuals in my life have reduced my choices into two discrete and obviously hierarchical options: the PhD option and the less desired, 'wasting time' option.

My family and friends represent a strong and legitimate viewpoint and I feel I need to take it into consideration. However, **the decision about my future can't rest on their opinions alone.** I started my undergraduate education interested in going to medical school. I finished it with a clear understanding that medical school was not for me and so I took time off to figure out what I wanted to do next. I returned to school to pursue a masters in public health. Now I'm leaving with a masters in public health and a lot of interest in economics, public policy, and international affairs. I know that I want to learn more, but I am unclear as to what I want to pursue. Also, after each stage of my education, I need to seek opportunities through which I can gain tangible experiences. To do so I need to go out into the world to do my part with the education I've worked so hard for, to move from theory to application and transition from the hypothetical to the real.

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### "Scholars," Continued from page 4

**Maiensy Sanchez** graduated as a piano professor and accompanist, followed by two years of musical composition at the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, Cuba. She is interested in the interconnections between socio-political dynamics and cultural expressions, with emphasis in the post-Revolutionary Cuba.

**Thuy Doan Tran** has recently completed a book drive to raise money for education in Vietnam. She is currently conducting research entitled "Ethnic and Cultural Differences Underlying Different Implicit Theories of Personality that Lead to Different Reaction to Achievement Setbacks." Faculty mentor: Dr. Jason Plaks, Psychology.

**Veronica Vasquez** has been awarded a full NIH scholarship for the past three years, and will be conducting research at the NIH next year. This summer she will participate in the

UW School of Medicine's SMEP program, and is currently conducting research on "Searching for the Molecular Basis of Nocturnality and Diurnality on Non-Human Primates." Faculty mentor: Dr. Horacio Oscar de la Iglesia, Biology.

**Anthony Vigil** is returning to school as a major in both Computer Engineering and Electrical Engineering, after owning his own business installing hardwood floors for eight years. He is the recipient of an endowed scholarship through the Computer Science & Engineering Department. He is the father of two, a son and a daughter.

**Judy Nai-Win Wang** is conducting research on "What is the Best Retirement Plan? A Comparison of Countries." Faculty mentor: Dr. Stephen Turnovsky, Economics.

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### “Marc: Benefiting,” Continued from page 2

Applying to graduate school for the second time, as a more mature student was easier. In fact, I didn't have nearly as many pressures and anxieties as I had previously. Especially because I was only applying to one school! Still, it was challenging. And the point here is not that it should be easy. **Creating a competitive application is never a task which can be carried out with ease.** The point is that I had my past experiences to build on, as well as the experiences and assistance of my peers in the EIP/McNair Office. And that alone made all the difference.

Utilizing the expertise of my co-workers here at EIP/McNair, I worked diligently to put an application together that accurately portrayed my goals, life experiences, and academic interests. After spending days pouring over materials, filling out applications, trying to convey ideas,

expressing life experiences—I was done, and weeks later admitted to the Master of Public Health program here at the University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine.

None of this would have been possible without a few basic steps. While my experience may not be shared by all, the methods I employed to achieve my goals are. Seeking out assistance from those who are able and willing to provide it is key. And in my life it has made all the difference. Whether I am the one who is assisting students, or the one being assisted, I have had invaluable experiences that have significantly contributed to my character, as well as to my academic and professional edification.

### “Zakiya: Culture,” Continued from page 3

Here is my advice: first, I think that it is important to understand the language of graduate school. Graduate school does have a language and it can be a complicated one. The language of graduate school is confusing because it rests on a set of assumptions about you—the student. It rests on the assumption that you know and **accept that you are the expert.** You are no longer expected to take in information and regurgitate it. Instead you are expected to synthesize the information and then transform it into something “original”. The language of graduate school also rests on the assumption that you have the necessary resources available to navigate your way through the maze. In terms of navigating your way through the maze, one resource that can be extremely valuable on campus are department and campus organizations that serve graduate students from underrepresented backgrounds. On this campus the Graduate Opportunities and Minority Achievement Program (GO-MAP) is an excellent resource for graduate students. Contacting the department and or looking up the information on the university's web page can help you find many such organizations. It is important to establish contacts with campus organizations and or programs that can help you with the non-academic aspects of graduate school.

My second bit of advice is to get organized! I found that getting organized was very helpful during my first year. When I made the decision to pursue my PhD in Women studies I knew that I would have a steep hill to climb. So in an attempt to avoid becoming completely overwhelmed I compartmentalized what I would have to

do. I suggest that you make lists and organize your degree requirements into phases. I made lists and organized my education according to the following phases: Phase I) pre-general exams - this consisted of course work and preparation for general exams; Phase II) post-general exams - this entailed creating a dissertation proposal, establishing a dissertation committee, focused period of field research, writing the dissertation, completing the dissertation and entering the job search. Phase III) post Ph.D., establishing tenure and beyond. I found that once I had everything laid out and planned I was not as overwhelmed because I could take it one step at a time.

The last advice I offer is that graduate department requirements will vary depending on the area and focus as well as the discipline so I recommend becoming proactive about what you will need to do in order to successfully progress through your department. One similarity is that all departments will require some combination of course work, general and qualifying exams, field research, thesis and or dissertation. So you should meet regularly with your primary advisor to discuss a plan that will be specific to you with regard to department requirements.

In conclusion I also recommend that you consider graduate school as an opportunity to change not only your personal situation but also as an opportunity to make a larger impact on society. Until more people from underrepresented groups apply and get into graduate programs there will still be the far too common occurrence of the students feeling like they are the only one or an imposter in the classroom.

*“My first year was a confusing labyrinth... I was paranoid that someone was going to tap on my shoulder and inform me that a huge mistake had been made, revoke my academic pass, and promptly escort me off of the premises. Had someone explained to me the realities of graduate school before I arrived, life would have been easier.”*

## “Rahel: Choice,” Continued from page 5

On a more practical note, I also need to work, pay off some debt, and address some personal life matters. Ahh... the “wasting time” path. It does sound appealing to do nothing, lounge around, and catch up on all the sleep I had to miss these last couple of years. Yet, despite the misleading title this path has been given by my friends and family, what I’m actually selecting to do is much more.

If you are to walk away with anything after having read this article, I wish it would be this: You will be required to continuously make choices about your academic

goals and you’ll have to take into consideration a slew of factors to which you are intimately tied. Having said this though, I have to warn you that sometimes it’s easy to use your circumstances as an excuse to avoid challenges that may seem too daunting. As you think about your academic future, you may go searching for advice and guidance, which I highly recommend, but the decision is **YOURS** to make; it should be truthful to the reality of your life.



The Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program operates as a part of the TRIO programs, which are funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The program is also supported by the Office of Minority Affairs and the Graduate School at the University of Washington.

## “Scholars,” Continued from page 5

**Alexis Wheeler** has just returned from South Africa, where she has been conducting research entitled “Analysis of the Politics of Life and Death in South Africa: The Role of Race and Class in Perceptions of the Death Penalty” as a UW Presidential Scholar. She was named to the National Dean’s List for the past two years. Faculty mentor: Dr. Lynn Thomas, History.

**Turquoise Young** was selected as a Student Outreach Ambassador to the UW’s Office of Minority Affairs. She spent

this winter quarter as a full time intern at the State Legislature.

**Jenny Yuen** was awarded the Microsoft Technical Scholarship for Women, and the Hullmut Golde and Microsoft Endowed Scholarship by the CSE department. This year she is conducting research as a Boeing/OMA scholar entitled “Creation of a Method to Identify Cataracts from a Large Database Using Statistical and Probabilistic Approaches.” Faculty mentor: Dr. Linda Shapiro, Computer Science & Engineering.

*Save the Date!*

*The 13th Annual EIP/McNair/GO-MAP  
Undergraduate Research Conference  
will be held May 6 & 7, 2005  
In the Husky Union Building (HUB)*

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## “Alyson: Balance,” Continued from page 4

However, I discovered a new dilemma when school started this year. In my field, traveling is often necessary, and trips to research conferences are encouraged both to promote yourself and meet with potential collaborators. Since October, I have spent ten days in Chile, two weeks in Minneapolis, one week in San Diego, and four days in Las Vegas. I am free to do these things now that I have no classes, but now there are other factors: my work at McNair and my personal life. So, this January I went out and bought a new weekly planner. I’ve learned to schedule my

travel so that it has minimal impact on my McNair schedule, and in addition I’ve devised a schedule that devotes whole days to each subject (Mon/Wed at McNair; Tues/Thurs/Fri at the astronomy department). I still have a few hours at the end of the day to relax and spend time with people who are important to me. It took me a while to figure out how to integrate all the components of my life, but I’ve finally managed to do it. As you McNair scholars face graduate school, know that it will be difficult and you will have to find your own way to survive, but when you come through on the other side, it will be worth it.