The McNair Scholars Program has given its participants the opportunity to enhance many skills that are valued at the graduate level. Along with writing research proposals and conducting research, the ability to present research is essential within higher levels of academia. In late September, I had the privilege to present my very own research on Omega-3 Supplementation for Insomnia at the 13th Annual Ronald E. McNair Heartland Research Conference in Kansas City at the Marriot Plaza Hotel. Many of my fellow scholars presented their research as well, including Eric Alicea, Jamie Bost, Harriet Browne, Jennifer Hurst, Carrie Mendoza, Joel Millan and Tony Prosser.

The Heartland Conference hosted McNair Scholars from fourteen universities around the country, and it was refreshing to not only see what kind of research they were conducting, but to socialize with them as well over the next three days. It was very apparent throughout our time there just how much effort all the faculty and coordinators gave, including Dr. Robert Rodriguez and Allyson Flaster, to make this an enriching experience. Every day, there were presentations by faculty members over pertinent topics such as tips on financing and applying for graduate school, staying motivated in graduate school, and a panel of professors who shared their own experiences as previous McNair Scholars. There was even a recruitment fair with university representatives to give us a head start in the application process. We thank the Heartland Conference for giving us the chance to improve as research presenters in an environment that truly cares about the future of McNair Scholars.

Brian Hiller
McNair Scholar

Heartland Conference Reflections

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Carrie Mendoza, current McNair Scholar, was presented with a McNair honor cord at the December McNair Symposium in honor of her fall 2009 graduation. Carrie is in the process of applying to graduate programs in social psychology that have an emphasis on existential psychology. She plans to work as the lab manager for her McNair Mentor, Dr. Mark Landau, during the spring 2010 semester.
Matthew Buechner, associate professor of molecular biosciences, was named the 2009 HOPE (Honor for Outstanding Progressive Educator) Award winner.

Three McNair mentors were honored with 2009 Kemper Fellowships for Teaching Excellence: Ruth Ann Atchley, associate professor of psychology, Andrea Greenhoot, associate professor of psychology and Sandra Gray, associate professor of anthropology.

Yo Jackson, associate professor of clinical child psychology, has been awarded a $1.7 million grant from the National Institutes of Health and National Institutes of Mental Health to study resilient youth in order to improve treatment of children who have suffered abuse or neglect.

Jamie Bost, current McNair Scholar, presented “The Effects of Lexical Category Frequency Bias on the Resolution of Syntactic Ambiguity” at the Mid-America Linguistics Conference.

Earl Brooks, current McNair Scholar, was selected to serve as a KU representative to the 2009-10 Rhodes Scholar and Marshall Scholar competitions.

Christina Garcia, current McNair Scholar, will intern with the Center for American Progress, a Washington D.C. think-tank during the spring 2010 semester.

Jenni Henslee, former McNair Scholar, was awarded a McNair Graduate Assistantship from Middle Tennessee State University.

Noy Phimphasone, former McNair Scholar, is a graduate student in the psychology masters program at California State University, Los Angeles. She is also a research assistant in the Cal State LA Learning Lab.

Tony Prosser, current McNair Scholar, was selected to serve as a KU representative to the 2010 Goldwater Scholar competition.

McNair Scholar Participates in Selective Graduate Prep Academy

Current Scholar Anthony Johnson was one of 10 students nationwide who was selected to participate in the University of Pennsylvania Grad Prep Academy. The academy brings students who plan to earn a Ph.D. in education to the Penn Graduate School of Education campus in Philadelphia for workshops, mentoring and visits with faculty and administrators. Congratulations, Anthony!

Former McNair Scholar Named a KU Woman of Distinction

Former Scholar Sylvia Niccum, who is currently a graduate student in KU’s Department of Curriculum and Teaching, has been named a 2009-10 KU Woman of Distinction. Sylvia was selected as a Woman of Distinction for her role in starting a food recovery program on the KU campus. Congratulations, Sylvia!

Scholar Achievements

Scholar Research Reflection

Don Claus
McNair Scholar

At the KU Biodiesel Initiative, we investigate methods to convert various feedstocks into a product called biodiesel. Our biodiesel is composed mainly of fatty acid methyl esters (FAME). Our current feedstock is waste vegetable oil from Mrs. E’s dining hall. The triglycerides within the waste vegetable oil are converted into FAME and then purified for use around campus.

The McNair Scholars Program gave me valuable preparation for this work. For example, I now recognize that almost any problem we experience in the lab is really an opportunity to perform research. If we are having a particular problem, chances are that someone else is having the same problem with their own process. By applying research principles one can document the solution to that problem and offer this knowledge to someone else.
Puerto Rico Cultural Exchange Program

Dagoberto Heredia
McNair Scholar

There have been many instances in which people assume that because I am Latino, I know all about Latin America and its numerous diverse cultures. This, however, is not the case. My parents have done a great job of continuing Mexican traditions in our home, but through the KU McNair Puerto Rico Cultural Experience and Academic Program, I was given the opportunity to experience Latin American culture outside that of my own. During our week long stay on “La Isla del Encanto” I experienced foods that captivated the senses, breathtaking views, and an island that is truly unlike any other.

On the first day we conquered El Yunque National Forest and the Fajardo Bioluminescent Lagoon. El Yunque is known for being the only tropical rainforest in the U.S. National Forest system. While there we hiked along a scenic trail whose twists and turns lead us through to precarious cliffs where we could look down and admire the tropical greenery below. The trail ultimately opened up to a breathtaking waterfall. Soon after our excursion in the rainforest we traveled to Fajardo where we explored a historic Spanish-built lighthouse as well as the town’s bioluminescent lagoon.

Each day brought about a new cultural experience. I came to the island with the intention of trying as many Puerto Rican dishes as possible, and did just that. Street vendors and swanky restaurants offered up an array of “Rican” dishes, some specific to their respective areas. On one side of the island I came across my favorite dish of the trip, arepas. Similar to what my mom would call, “sopes” or “gorditas,” an arepa is a deep-fried bread made of corn that is split down the middle and stuffed with ingredients of your choosing. Staying true to the island feel, I ordered an arepa stuffed with onions and fresh jumbo shrimp. While on the island I was introduced to many new foods, many of which I’ve since made with Puerto Rican friends here in Kansas.

Pinchos, tostones, and the renowned mayo-ketchup; although each were delicious, what I valued most from the trip was the conversation and bonding over dinner and while out and about on the island. It was awesome to connect with the Universidad Interamericana McNair Scholars. Through them we learned about their research projects, experiences, and a lot about campus life on the island. Since returning to Kansas I’ve kept contact with the Scholars I met and am looking forward to returning to the island soon. I learned a lot in that short week, and will be incorporating Puerto Rican schools into my graduate school search. This was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience and I am very grateful to have been chosen to attend.

National McNair Conference Reflection

Brandy Fogg
McNair Scholar

I recently attended the 18th Annual National McNair Research Conference and Graduate School Fair in Delavan, Wisconsin. The students in attendance came from all over the United States. I was lucky enough to room with two other Scholars from Texas Southern University. This provided a very unique networking experience as well as a fun “summer camp” feel to the trip.

I heard from many distinguished speakers, including graduate admissions expert Don Asher. He offered a wealth of useful advice to every scholar, including tips such as not self selecting yourself out of certain programs by not applying; just apply anyway. He also reminded me of the importance of having an advanced degree right now. One quote from his speech that has stuck with me was in regards to the amount of unemployment of people with PhD’s: “The number has risen in the past year from 2 percent to 3 percent.”

I was able to see firsthand what sort of research was being done around the country at the conference. Some of the projects closely resembled a few of the SRI’s done at Kansas. I am very grateful for having been given the opportunity to attend the conference and hope to see more KU McNair Scholars doing big things.
We're on the Web!
http://www.mcnair.ku.edu

Scholar Spotlight: Eric Martinez

Eric Martinez is a model McNair Scholar. He has conducted two Summer Research Internships in the field of social psychology, one of which—a study of the significance Whites and Latinos place on ethnicity and academic record in determining the quality of potential college applicants—he designed and administered independently. While not conducting research, Eric is participating in university service. He is the former president of the KU chapter of the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations and a member of the Hispanic American Leadership Organization. He has also assisted the KU Harvest of Hope Leadership Academy and Upward Bound Programs by providing advice to their high-school aged participants on how to prepare for college. He also works 20 hours per week at his part-time job and makes visits to his family in his hometown of Garden City, Kansas.

In his little spare time, Eric enjoys playing guitar, attending concerts, playing video games and reading research articles. He is in the process of applying to graduate programs in social and community psychology, and hopes to research culture, gender dynamics and discrimination against military veterans in the future. He has been inspired to pursue a Ph.D. by his parents, neither of whom graduated from high school and have worked hard so that Eric could attend college. He says the KU McNair Scholars Program “has provided me with opportunity and moved me further in thinking about graduate school. Without it, I would probably be lost.”