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Developing Leaders  
Through Graduate Education

# The McNair Scholar's Program

Since the inception of the program in 1999, the McNair Scholars Program at Cal Poly Pomona has served over 350 students and 48 have completed their doctorates so far, with 104 additional scholars currently in graduate school!

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate these scholars and hope that their accomplishments inspire everyone to reach for the stars and pursue their dreams.

## Cohort 18 Spent the Summer Researching At...

<i>Cal Poly Pomona</i>	<i>University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill</i>
<i>University of Southern California</i>	<i>New York University</i>
<i>University of California, Los Angeles</i>	<i>San Diego State University</i>
<i>University of California, Riverside</i>	<i>Northwestern University</i>
<i>University of Michigan</i>	<i>Donald Danforth Plant Science Center</i>
<i>Ohio State University</i>	<i>Southern California Edison</i>
<i>Stanford</i>	<i>Nebraska SRP</i>
<i>Rutgers</i>	<i>Michigan State University</i>

**Save the date! The 18th Annual Symposium is Friday May 25, 2018**

Pictured: Dr. Jessica Kizer, Cohort 10 Speaking at the 17th Annual McNair Symposium

Stay Connected: [www.CPP.Edu/~McNair](http://www.CPP.Edu/~McNair)  
Facebook: McNairCPP Scholars



## Director's Message

The McNair Scholars Program is dedicated to helping low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona advance into graduate programs across the nation. I hope this newsletter will give you a glimpse of the wonderful things current and past scholars are doing.

Our tremendous success is due to the dedication of staff that has served the program over the past 18 years, the brilliant and wonderful students, and the support of the university, the broader community, and the U.S. Department of Education. If you would like to help us continue to thrive, please consider one of these ways:

## Sharing Your Successes

Let your congressional representatives know what the McNair Scholars Program has allowed you to achieve. Congress sets the budget for the McNair Program. By speaking up for the program, you will help congressional members see the importance of investing in future leaders and prevent funding cuts. To contact your elected officials, go to [www.house.gov/representatives/find](http://www.house.gov/representatives/find) and [www.senate.gov/senators/contact](http://www.senate.gov/senators/contact).

## Supporting the Scholars

Presenting research results at professional conferences is one of the best ways for a scholar to get noticed by potential graduate faculty mentors as well as providing invaluable opportunities for networking. Additionally, scholars are encouraged to visit graduate schools and attend recruitment events.

With your help, we are also instituting a new scholarship, available to McNair Scholars, ranging between \$500 to \$2,000. Please help by sending donations to the McNair Scholars Program at <https://secure.qgiv.com/for/?key=calpolyadvancement>.

Thank you. I hope you will stop by and say hello the next time you are near Cal Poly Pomona.

Sincerely,

Dr. Winny Dong



# Introducing the 2017-2018 McNair Scholars

**Success Carter**

Political Science  
Dr. Renford Reese

**Anna Lui**

Psychology  
Dr. Sara Langord

**Tania Roa**

Psychology  
Dr. Aubrey Fine

**Ho Lun Chan**

Chemical Engineering  
Dr. Vilupanur Ravi

**Julissa Loza Mendez**

Psychology  
Dr. Eleonora Rossi

**Matthew Schumaier**

Business Management and Economics  
Dr. Zeynep Aytug

**Raymundo Gonzalez**

Mechanical Engineering  
Dr. Mehrdad Haghi

**Kate Ly**

Mechanical Engineering  
Dr. Todd Coburn

**Salar Tabesh**

Chemical Engineering  
Dr. Vilupanur Ravi

**Meice Hamad**

Psychology  
Dr. Renford Reese

**Jesus Navarro**

Psychology  
Dr. Alejandro Morales

**Carrisa Tang**

Anthropology  
Ms. Kai Smith

**Andy KlaiB**

Electrical Engineering  
Dr. Scott Boskovich

**Tuan Nguyen**

Mechanical Engineering  
Dr. Reza Lakeh

**Tai Tran**

Chemical Engineering  
Dr. Laila Jallo

**Anthony LeBou**

Geology  
Dr. Nicholas Van Buer

**Tanya Orla**

Applied Mathematics  
Dr. Adam King

**Karissa Vermillion**

Geology  
Dr. Nicholas Van Buer

**Leanna Little Dog**

Animal Science  
Dr. Shelton Murinda

**Angel Perez**

Biology  
Dr. Nancy Buckley

**Joseph Wolf**

Plant Science  
Dr. Subodh Bhandari

## The McNair Scholars Program Team



Dr. Winnie Dong  
Director



Elena Alvarez Villegas  
Assistant Director



Dr. Frank Torres  
Director Emeritus



Dr. Wei Bidlack  
Program Faculty Advisor



Amanda Riggle  
Program Student Advisor



Tiana Chanaiwa  
Assistant Program Coordinator

## Graduate School Bound!



**Hsien-Te Kao**  
McNair Cohort 17

**USC**  
Started Fall 2017

**PhD in Computer Science**

“My ultimate goal is to become a computational social scientist at a four-year university that monitors and prevents hostile extremism on social media. The McNair Scholar’s Program became my academic family and provided me with the environment, resources, and support for me to flourish as a researcher. My best experience as a McNair scholar was becoming a mentor for new scholars and helping them become acclimated to the McNair Scholar’s Program.”



**Asma Ayyad**  
McNair Cohort 17

**UC Riverside**  
Started Fall 2017

**PhD in Plant Biology**

“I honestly wouldn’t be in a PhD program if it wasn’t for the McNair Scholar’s Program. It taught me everything I need to know. I walked into the program knowing close to nothing about graduate school. Ultimately I would love to become a professor and continue researching ways to improve current farming methods that will meet future demands.”



**Matthew Galazzo**  
McNair Cohort 18

**Fisk-Vanderbilt Bridge Program**  
Started Fall 2017

**MS in Chemistry at Fisk**

**PhD in Chemistry at Vanderbilt**

“Without the help of the McNair staff, I would not have found myself in this graduate program. Amanda Riggle and Dr. Winny Dong spent countless hours over the winter break and quarter helping me strengthen my application materials. In the future I want to conduct postdoctoral research and transition into industry research, ideally in the field of batteries or fuel cells.”



**Glen Morrison**  
McNair Cohort 16

**UC Riverside**  
Started Fall 2017

**PhD in Plant Biology**

“The McNair Scholar’s Program showed me that grad school was a practical option for me; I had not known STEM PhDs could be funded. The community of student-scholars that McNair fostered allowed me to make powerful friendships that gave me motivation and examples of accomplishment in the field I planned to pursue and now am.”

# McNair Scholar's Berkeley Symposium 2017



The McNair Berkeley Symposium was simply the best experience of my college career.  
—Britney Banner, McNair Cohort 18



## Laila Jallo, Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering

### Assistant Professor of Chemical and Materials Engineering

Dr. Laila Jallo grew up in Guana, part of West Africa and also part of the British Virgin Islands chain in what is also known as the Caribbean. She attended school in Guana in her formative years and earned her Bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Science and Technology, now known as the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.

School for Dr. Jallo wasn't easy at first, not because of the schooling itself, but because of the expectations of society around her. "Mostly parents would send their boys to school and the girls would stay home and help" she stated. "I'm a Muslim," she continued, "I grew up in a society where the way people see education is like it's a western thing. You're really not encouraged so much to pursue that." Dr. Jallo was taught to "respect her elders," and said that, on more than one occasion, "some older person would call me and say, I know you're going to school and you like it, but you should quit school and get married."

After completing her Bachelor's degree, Dr. Jallo was accepted to an MS in Pharmaceutical Engineering at New Jersey Institute of Technology which led her to pursue her Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering at the same institute. For Dr. Jallo, the school system in the U.S. "was a different experience. When I went to school for undergraduate studies, professors never gave us homework. We're only ever graded on midterms and finals...When I first started here and went to classes, there was all this homework. In the beginning, it was overwhelming like, 'oh my god, that's a lot of work.' But then I realized no, I'm studying. I don't wait until the last minute to cram everything. In the beginning, it was stressful but then I was able to adjust because I learned it's not much, you just have to do it a little at a time."

Once Dr. Jallo had a handle on her homework load, the rest of graduate school went well; "I joined as a research assistant so I started doing research from day one. I was almost done with all of the research that I needed to do before I even did my proposal." She further expressed, "When I did my proposal, I had a few months left to graduate. It was so funny. I just did it and put the results in and I had published most of what I was doing already. I defended it and, yeah, I got my Ph.D. through an engineering research center sponsored by NSF. I was just lucky, I guess."

Now, as an Assistant Professor in the College of Engineering, Dr. Jallo finds herself motivated by her students. "I just love waking up and coming to school and being able to teach something and see somebody understand." She often finds herself in the role of mentor for her students as well through "a lot of senior projects" and has even published work in the past with her undergraduate students. Dr. Jallo has also mentored many McNair students like Vincent Moya from cohort 17, Houg Tran from cohort 18, and will mentor Tai Tran from cohort 19. The biggest thing Dr. Jallo wants students to understand "is that students should ask questions." She elaborated further and said that "If you ask a question, if the person you ask doesn't know, they may know somebody who knows – that's the first thing. First-generation students need to know that."



## Manny Diaz, Ph.D. in Education



***BA in Psychology, Cal Poly Pomona 2008***  
***MA in Psychological Counseling, Columbia 2010***  
***MA in Education, Claremont Graduate University 2016***  
***Ph.D. in Education, Claremont Graduate University 2017***

Dr. Manny Diaz started his career as a psychology major with a minor in multicultural studies. During his time as a McNair Scholar, Dr. Diaz felt that “the program quickly became home” to him: “from developing an original research study, collecting data, learning from the workshops, going on field trip outings with students and staff, and memorably staying up way past my bedtime with my cohort in the dorms eating, laughing, and screaming at late-night hours made the experience all worth it.”

Now with his PhD in Education, Dr. Diaz recognizes that “there is no direct path to where you think you will end up or what you will study.” Students need to “Take risks in your academic and scholarly development, even if it makes you uncomfortable for a moment. Remember that graduate school is not forever and is only temporary. Based on what you learned in the McNair Scholar Program, begin graduate school with a strong idea of what areas of research you want to explore but be open to slight change and flexibility as you progress through your studies. Challenge yourself but also be certain to engage in self-care!”

## Dr. Jessica Kizer, Ph.D. in Sociology



***BA in Sociology, Cal Poly Pomona 2010***  
***MA in Sociology, UC Irvine 2012***  
***Ph.D. in Sociology, UC Irvine 2017***

When she first started at Cal Poly Pomona, Dr. Jessica Kizer recalls that she was “very shy, extremely shy” but that Dr. Danico not only helped her become acclimated to campus but helped her apply to the McNair Scholar’s Program. Dr. Kizer recalls her McNair cohort fondly as a group that “was really special” and that “it was amazing to be around other people who wanted to go on to graduate school and who supported one another in the process.”

Dr. Kizer found motivation to complete her PhD in her desire to become a professor: “I wanted to be a professor and to have the freedom to study what I wanted. I also just love sociology so much. Sociology helps me understand my place in the world and helps me see the invisible forces affecting all of our lives.”

Now, as an Assistant Professor at Pitzer College, Dr. Kizer can offer advice to current and future McNair Scholars: “Keep thinking like the researchers you are. Treat your professional development as the most important research project you will ever complete. Gather data, consult with experts, and make conclusions based on your findings.”

# About Trio and the McNair Scholars Program

The Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) are Federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs.

Designed to assist first-generation, low-income students and those who are underrepresented at the graduate and doctoral level, the program at Cal Poly Pomona was first funded in 1999. The Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program is named for Dr. Ronald E. McNair, one of those who perished aboard the space shuttle Challenger in January 1986.

The McNair Scholars Program at Cal Poly Pomona is a one- or two-year program designed to improve students' research skills and prepare them for entering graduate schools and advanced study. This education grant provides an internship opportunity for students to learn how to do research, present their findings at a summer symposium and at national conferences, and successfully apply for and enter graduate school. Through the efforts of the students themselves, the faculty mentors, and the program staff, these students can achieve their goals.



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