

FALL 2019 NEWSLETTER



Developing Leaders
Through Graduate Education

THE MCNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Since the inception of the program in 1999, the McNair Scholars Program at Cal Poly Pomona has served over 370 students and over 55 have completed their doctorates so far, with 93 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.

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ANNOUNCEMENT



The 21st Annual Ronald E. McNair
Scholars Undergraduate Research
Symposium

Thursday, April 23, 2020
From 3:00 to 6:30 PM

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Director's Message

It is such a privilege and honor to serve as the Faculty Director of The McNair Scholars Program at Cal Poly Pomona. The scholars are inspirational and the staff is dedicated, I can't ask for a better group of people to work with. One of the highlights for the McNair team is hearing from our past scholars. We feature some of their stories in this newsletter and would love to hear from you as well. Please let us know if you plan to be in the area or send us an email message to let us know how you are doing.

Sincerely,
Dr. Winny Dong

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

A huge thank-you to everyone who donated as part of the 20th Anniversary Celebration. Due to your generosity, we were able support Dreamers' participation in McNair activities, provide scholarships for recent CPP McNair graduates to support them during their transition to graduate school, and send care packages for McNair scholars who attended summer research experiences far away from home.

Please see your impact on page 3. To contribute, please go to:

https://www.gofundme.com/f/cal-poly-pomona-mcnair-scholars-program?utm_source=customer&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_campaign=p_cf+share-flow-1

THE MCNAIR SCHOLARS TEAM



Dr. Winny Dong
Director



Elena Alvarez Villegas
Assistant Director



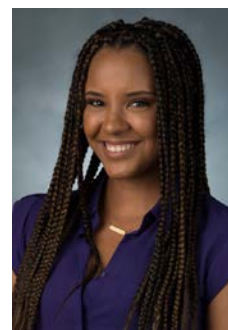
Dr. Frank Torres
Director Emeritus



Dr. Alejandro Morales
Faculty Fellow



Dr. Wei Bidlack
Program Faculty
Advisor



Tiana Chanaiwa
Assistant Program
Coordinator

THANK YOU'S

Graduate School Transition Scholarships

The Graduate School Transition Scholarship helped pay for gas, food, and hotel rooms during my 3-day road trip across the country to begin graduate school at Georgia Tech. I am very grateful for having such financial support en route to pursue my dream!

Also, graduate school is going really well! I feel very fortunate to be in the lab group I am in because the research is the most compelling research I've worked on, my advisor is understanding yet challenges me to be better, and my fellow grad students are some of the kindest, most intelligent people I've ever met. The classes are very difficult of course, but my interest in the material and fellow grad students motivate me to study hard. All this makes me appreciate the McNair program that much more!

-Steven Ochoa

After graduating last May (2019), I am now pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Notre Dame studying environmental actinide chemistry. I was the fortunate recipient of the Graduate School Transition Scholarship, which helped me cover the moving expenses to make the 5-day drive from Southern California, hauling a small trailer, and get settled in my new home.

Moving two thousand miles away from home was a lot more challenging than I would have expected. Thanks to this scholarship I did not need to incur any debt from the moving and other unexpected expenses that came with the move. Cal Poly Pomona and the McNair program have given me outstanding preparation for the challenges ahead. I have been proactive and very fortunate in seeking opportunities to go beyond, and it has been thanks to donors like you that I have been able to go the extra mile. As an ethnic minority and coming from a low-income family, every day I can achieve more than I had ever imagined thanks to programs like the McNair Scholars and this GST scholarship. Thank you for helping me achieve my goals and supporting me in my journey.

-Manny Vejar

Summer Research Care Packages

I just want to thank the McNair Scholar Program for the thoughtful care package! I received the package yesterday and all the goodies were delicious.

Thank you for the kind gift I truly appreciate it!

**-Abbey Ibarra
Portland State University**

I just wanted to say thank you for the care package! It definitely could not come at a better time, just as I was missing home a little more. My hall mates appreciated the candy too. Please give the rest of the McNair family my gratitude for that reminder of home. See you all soon!

**-Viviana Piceno
University of Michigan**

Thank you SO much for the care package!

I LOVE the candy, I've been really craving it!

I appreciate it all and the note, as well.

**-Beverly Cotter
University of Florida**



INTRODUCING THE 2019-2020 MCNAIR SCHOLARS

Marina Alvarado

Biotechnology
Dr. Jose Aguilar-Hernandez

Helena Balagula

Sociology
Dr. Anjana Narayan

Victor Baserga

Sociology
Dr. Gabriele Plickert

Steven Buenas

Landscape Architecture
Dr. Juintow Li

Carla Castillo

Computer Science
Dr. Ben Steinchen

Jinfeng Chen

Business Administration
Dr. Aytug Zeynep

Jasmine Cooper

Psychology
Dr. Robert Blumenfeld

Dayna Denver

Microbiology
Dr. Erin Questad

Stephanie Ferreyra

Biology
Dr. Ansel Zhao

Genesis Flores

Psychology
Dr. Kevin Autry

Emely Giron

Biology
Dr. Frances Mercer

Edgar Guzman

Electrical Engineering
Dr. Jenny Yu

Zane Landin

Science, Technology
and Society
Dr. Peter Ross

Clifton Lee

Psychology
Dr. Alejandro Morales

Zachary Martinez

Psychology
Dr. Alejandro Morales

Sarah Moore

Psychology
Dr. Michael Giang

Geovani Munoz

Psychology
Dr. Alejandro Morales

Daniela Navarro

Psychology
Dr. Viviane Seyranian

Kelly Nguyen

Psychology
Dr. Zeynep Aytug

Meri Okorie

Biotechnology
Dr. Ertan Salik

Michelle Ravel

Animal Science
Dr. Jill Adler

Yvonne Rivera

Psychology
Dr. Mary Yu Danico

Ellie Rosa

Gender, Ethnic,
Multicultural Studies Major
Dr. Shayda Kafai

Kush Shah

Electrical Engineering
Dr. Zhen Yu

Bryan Tapia

Psychology
Dr. Kevin Autry

Anna Watkins

Sociology
Dr. Mary Yu Danico



REU EXPERIENCES



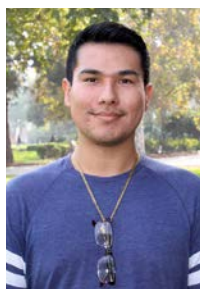
“What I enjoyed the most about my Summer Undergraduate Research at Florida (SURF) experience at the University of Florida was the ability to interact with graduate students and faculty from multiple subfields of my own discipline, to gauge a better understanding of how different labs work, different perspectives of one field, and many more. I really enjoyed feeling like I was a part of the graduate community at the University of Florida within my discipline and get a better understanding of how graduate school will really be. There were times where I felt out of my comfort zone, many more than I expected, but those were the moments where I felt like I was learning the most and preparing myself for graduate school in the future. I knew that if I never felt that way, I wouldn’t have gotten the full experience from my REU. All of these experiences I think benefit students no matter what.” - **Beverly Cotter, Cohort 20**



“Overall attending the Caltech WAVE Summer Research increased my interest in attending grad school. While I was conducting experiments, I couldn’t picture myself anywhere else. I would go home and wonder about the new information we were going to find next. Information that no one else in the world has seen before. Every day in lab was exciting.” - **Jenny Martinez, Cohort 20**



“Attending the Molecular Pharmacology Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP) at the University of Pittsburgh not only increased my interest to attend graduate school, but also made me want to apply to their programs. Summer internships and programs are a great way to gain/expand helpful skills and experiences for the future.” - **Meri Okorie, Cohort 21**



“I enjoyed being part of the Summer Undergraduate Research Internship Program at the University of Pittsburgh because I was able to take part of a graduate laboratory and work with graduate student mentors. I received plenty of [information] on what a graduate program looks like, and the work done within it. I learned a variety of ideas and methods regarding research, data analysis, and presenting data. I believe [summer research programs] help students feel more confident and learn the motions in a graduate program.” - **Bryan Tapia, Cohort 21**



STUDENTS PHD BOUND



Jose Becerra, Purdue University, Anthropology | Started Fall 2019

I feel that McNair prepared me for graduate school in many aspects. As a McNair scholar I learned about graduate school expectations, work habits, and research. In my opinion, McNair mimics what graduate school is like in having to balance between classes and the many aspects of research. Getting started in my graduate program here at Purdue, I felt confident balancing classes, research, applying for conferences, and writing. The McNair Scholar's Program did a great job in demystifying research and graduate school which is especially important when preparing to move across the country into a new institution. On top of providing resources for students, McNair also creates a sense of community that helps navigate through undergraduate research, graduate school applications, and even in graduate school during graduate school.



Shea Duarte, UC Davis, Psychology | Started Fall 2019

My most memorable experience as a McNair Scholar was the symposium at the end of the year. I remember feeling so proud of myself for completing my research project from start to finish and grateful that I was able to share that research with the people who supported me along the way so that they were able to see what they helped me accomplish. McNair was extremely helpful in my preparation for graduate school. It demystified so much about what it actually takes to get a PhD, how to apply, and how to receive funding. The program also gave me the opportunity to start a research project from scratch and learn about every aspect of the research process, and having those skills made my transition into graduate school very smooth.



Manuel Vejar, University of Notre Dame, Civil & Environmental Engineering & Earth Sciences | Started Fall 2019

The most valuable aspect of the McNair Program I think were all the small but extremely useful workshops. These workshops collectively taught me how to plan and present my research, prepared me for the GRE, taught me the basics of applying to graduate schools, and helped me assess my strengths and weaknesses so that I can motivate and drive my academic work. I feel like McNair prepared me for graduate school from learning to manage and plan my own research project thoroughly to helping me develop and improve my presentation skills. It also prepared me by showing me that in many cases there are resources on campus or through external organizations to help students find a sense of community, find financial resources, or nurture interests outside of our "traditional" disciplines. The program also sort of walked me through the process of applying for graduate schools, from preparing for the GRE to how to ask for letters of recommendation, to how to fund/waive the application fees.

FACULTY PROFILE



MEET DR. ALEJANDRO MORALES

Dr. Morales is a professor from the Department of Psychology at Cal Poly Pomona, and a dedicated McNair Faculty Fellow and Mentor.

What was your education journey, from your undergraduate degree to your doctorate degree?

I received my BA in Psychology from California State University, Dominguez Hills. My MA and PhD in Counseling Psychology are from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. My education journey can be best described as riding a rollercoaster. I couldn't wait to get on it, there were highs and lows, it felt like forever while riding it, and at the end you realize that it wasn't that bad nor long.

Were you the first person in your family to go to college? If not, were you the first person in your family to get an advanced degree?

I was the first in my family to get a college degree and the first to receive an MA and PhD.

What motivates you as an educator?

I am motivated by the students in my classes and those who I mentor with their research projects. Cal Poly has provided me with opportunities to be surrounded by talented students who are passionate about psychology and want to make a difference in people's life. I am also lucky to have a department where my colleagues are supportive of my teaching and research.

Did you ever consider a different career path? If so, what was that path?

Growing up, I wanted to be an elementary school teacher.

Did/do you have any mentors helping you through your academic career?

Yes. I am lucky to have a mentoring family. I continue consulting with some of them now that I am a professor.

What is it like to be a McNair mentor?

It is one of the most rewarding experiences in my academic career! I get to witness the development of talented, intelligent, and humble scholars of color. I see their confidence and passion for research develop. More importantly, my mentees motivate me to be a better mentor and professor.



ALUMNI PROFILE



DIANNE SANCHEZ

PhD in Earth System Science

Dr. Dianne Sanchez graduated from Cal Poly Pomona in 2014 with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry. While at Cal Poly, Dr. Sanchez was involved in various research programs, including the McNair Scholars Program, SEES, an MBRSE-RISE Invitational Fellowship, and a UC Davis Air Pollution Research Fellowship. Reflecting on her time in these programs, Dr. Sanchez says, “These research experiences solidified my desire to pursue a PhD. I explored interdisciplinary graduate programs that applied physical sciences to the study of the environment.” After applying to nine graduate programs, Dr. Sanchez accepted an offer from University of California, Irvine’s Earth System Science Program and began working in her new laboratory at UCI a week after graduating from Cal Poly. She received her Masters in Earth System Science in 2016.

Three years later, she defended her dissertation, entitled “Towards the Closure of Reactivity and Volatile Organic Compound Budgets in the Troposphere using in situ Observations.” Discussing the process of completing her dissertation, Dr. Sanchez shares, “The dissertation writing process helped me realize how much I had accomplished. It gave me a boost of confidence and helped me shake a lot of the imposter feelings that still lingered. Sharing my work with my family, friends, colleagues, (and mentor from Cal Poly!) during my public defense felt great.” Dr. Sanchez was fortunate to have the support of her family and friends and says that pursuing hobbies, experiences, and relationships outside the bubble of academia helped remind her that there was more to life than graduate school. She says, “maintaining a healthy work-life balance rather than making graduate school a central part of my identity actually increased my productivity. The more productive I was, the more progress I made, and progress itself was a great motivator.” Dr. Sanchez received her PhD in Earth Science Systems from UCI in 2019.

Dr. Sanchez entered graduate school with the intent of later working in science policy. Different experiences in graduate school also led her to consider careers in teaching at the university level or working as a research scientist at a national lab. Ultimately, she pursued her original plan and is now at a government agency (South Coast AQMD) developing air quality policies in environmental justice communities. She names her career as her biggest motivator during the last couple quarters of her PhD program, saying, “I had landed my dream job and they wanted me to start right away, so I did. I began working “part-time” (35 hours a week) at my new job, while writing my dissertation and preparing for my defense. I wanted to finish writing and defend so I could focus on my career and not worry about grad school.” Her job allows her the opportunity to combine her passions for scientific communication, community outreach/engagement, and environmental justice.

While Dr. Sanchez was as a McNair scholar, she had an experience that was particularly helpful to her finishing her doctorate. During a workshop on applying to graduate school, Dr. Don Asher gave the advice that scholars should not fantasize about getting into graduate school; instead, they should fantasize about writing their applications. He explained that fantasizing about the end result would not help them achieve it, but that actually doing the work would. Thinking back on that workshop, Dr. Sanchez says, “That stuck with me through graduate school. I would try not to fantasize about getting a PhD, but rather the work I had to do in order to get me there.” Her advice for current scholars is: Know your end goal. Why are you are pursuing a PhD? Keep that end goal in mind when your journey gets tough.

21ST ANNUAL RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM



YOU ARE INVITED TO
21st Annual Ronald E. McNair Scholars
Undergraduate Research Symposium



THURSDAY, APRIL 23RD, 2020

Kellogg West Conference Center - Hillside

3:00-5:15 PM

Research Presentations

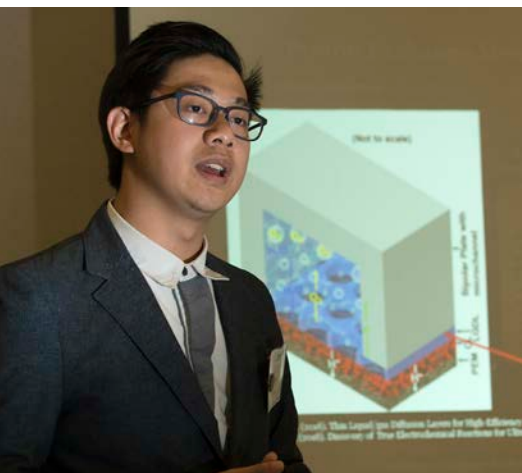
5:15-6:30 PM

Dinner Reception



FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT,

<https://www.cpp.edu/~mcnair/news-and-events/index.shtml>





ABOUT TRIO AND THE MCNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM

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.

VISIT US



DR. RONALD E. MCNAIR

RONALD E. MCNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM

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Pomona, CA 91786

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