



McNair Newsletter

Fall 2020

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Since the inception of the program in 1999, the McNair Scholars Program at Cal Poly Pomona has served over 400 students and over 56 have completed their doctorates so far, with 98 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.



Developing Leaders
Through Graduate Education

Director's Message

What a year it has been! The McNair program moved online in March 2020. The scholars have been very patient with us while we try different methods of delivering the content, support, and engagement that are crucial to the program's success. In April, the Annual McNair Scholars Symposium took place on Zoom - with over 60 attendees. In fact, the event went so well, we may continue to offer part of the symposium online in the future so that it is more accessible to family and friends. In July, we hosted the McNair summer research program for 12 scholars. We are grateful to the faculty research mentors for making the adjustment to ensure that scholars were engaged in meaningful and rigorous research remotely for 5 weeks. The scholars ended their research experience by presenting their research at the Summer Creative Activities and Research conference at Cal Poly Pomona on Aug. 6th, also online. As we carry on this academic year, the emotional wellbeing of the scholars is a top priority. Besides the weekly workshops, Cohort 22 meets in "houses" with returning scholars who function as peer mentors. These informal, online, get-togethers provide a venue for scholars to ask questions, bond, and support one another. 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. We hope you are staying well, both physically and mentally.

Sincerely,
Dr. Winny Dong



Dr. Winny Dong
Director



Elena Alvarez Villegas
Assistant Director



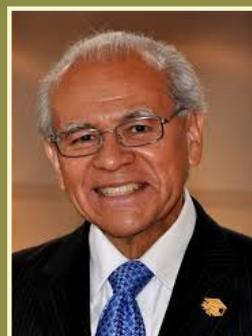
Tiana Chanaiwa
Assistant Coordinator



Dr. Alejandro Morales
Faculty Fellow



Dr. Brian Ramirez
Faculty Fellow



Dr. Frank Torres
Director Emeritus



Dr. Wei Bidlack
Faculty Advisor



Introducing the 2020-2021 McNair Scholars

Cintia Alaniz

Psychology
Dr. Alejandro Morales

Ruben Arredondo

Psychology
Dr. Alejandro Morales

Charles Bickham

Computer Science
Dr. Adam Summerville

Carlos Calderon

Animal Health Science
Dr. Joanne Sohn

Lawon Carney

ElectroMechanical Systems Engineering
Dr. Farbod Khoshnoud

Julia Dominguez

Psychology
Dr. Shayda Kafai

Lizette Enriquez

Chemistry
Dr. Gregory Barding

Thisuri Fonseka

Anthropology
Dr. Amy Dao

Elvis Garcia

Food Science and Technology
Dr. Gabriel Davidov Pardo

Audriana Gregorio

Psychology
Dr. Robert Blumenfeld

Haocheng Liang

Chemistry
Dr. Yan Liu

Steven Lopez

Psychology
Dr. James Sturges

Natali Mendez

Food and Nutrition
Dr. Bonny Burns-Whitmore

Jeanney Munoz

General Biology
Dr. Thomas Osberger

Jillian Munoz

Psychology
Dr. Sara Langford

Frankie Nieblas

Psychology
Dr. Viviane Seyranian

Christian Ordaz

Plant Science
Dr. Valerie Mellano

Karina Ortiz

Philosophy
Dr. Katherine Gasdaglis

Tammy Phan

Anthropology
Dr. James Blair

Araselly Romero

Psychology
Norma Leon

Diego Roque Aguayo

Animal Science
Dr. Ondieki Gekara

Ryan Sandoval

Computer Engineering
Dr. Ildar Salakhutdinov

Christian Tamayo

Aerospace Engineering
Dr. Zahra Sotoudeh

Valerie Tapia

Psychology
Dr. Viviane Seyranian

Angelica Villavicencio

Sociology
Dr. Mary Danico



Summer Research Experiences

“

After my REU I have definitely become more enthusiastic about applying to and attending graduate school. I enjoyed being able to network with graduate students and learning about their own personal research projects. I was able to learn new skills through this REU and also hone previous skills! I definitely would recommend it because I felt very supported during the whole REU. The lab I was a part of and my mentor were all willing to guide me through this summer experience and helped me become more confident in my skills. The professional development workshops offered were also super helpful and informative.

”



Kelly Nguyen
SR-EIP at UPenn Wharton



Genesis Flores

USC Diversity, Inclusion, and Access
JumpStart Summer Research Program

“

It was such a great experience and allowed me to develop new research skills and interact with people in my field. I also enjoyed that the program itself was separate from the lab, as I got to interact with people in other disciplines and learn about their experiences. I liked that I got to experience what a larger lab was like. At CPP, my lab experiences have just been with undergraduates and the PI, but the summer lab I was in consisted of a much larger, varied group of students and post-docs. I also liked that despite being online, I was able to work on a variety of projects and learn new research skills.

”

“

I was lucky enough to work with the lab that is my first choice for graduate school at UCLA. Through working with Clinical Psychology graduate students, I feel better prepared to apply to Clinical Psych graduate programs. The program also delivered many workshops related to graduate school application preparedness as well. The staff and program coordinators for the program were amazing to work with as they constantly strived to accommodate scholars and meet their research and professional needs. Despite the pandemic, I truly enjoyed the program and what the staff at UCLA had to offer.

”



Karli Cheng
UCLA Summer Programs
for Undergraduates

2020 PhD Bound Scholars



Jennette Ramirez
University of
Southern California
American Studies

"Starting graduate school 6 months into the pandemic called for flexibility. With that being said, my classes have been wonderful. McNair prepared me for grad school by making sure I knew the IRB process and how to write a research paper. Time management has been more important than ever, and the McNair scholars program made sure that we had classes that focused on time management and the significance of self-care."



Ho Lun Chan
University
of Virginia
Materials Science
& Engineering

"Graduate school has been very engaging and exciting! My research interest (Corrosion and Electrochemistry) and my personality fit really well with my current research group members and advisor. In spite of the ongoing pandemic, I was fortunate that I was able to work in the lab and perform experiments in preparation for numerous publications. The courses are challenging, but they are manageable thanks to the preparation from the rigorous chemical engineering curriculum at CPP. I enjoy my moment everyday and certainly no regret for this decision."



Beverly Cotter
UC Davis
Cognitive
Neuroscience

"At times, I feel as though I'm a small fish in a very, very big pond and that can be quite intimidating. But, I have become more comfortable with going out of my comfort zone, asking for help and being honest and accepting of the fact that it is okay to not know everything. It has taken me some time to realize that I am here to learn and that I'm not expected to know everything before coming in, that's why I'm in graduate school!"



Carla Castillo
University of Washington
Human Centered
Design & Engineering



Jenny Martinez
UC Irvine
Materials Science



Viviana Piceno
Purdue University
Counseling Psychology



Juan Ramón Sevilla
University of Illinois
at Chicago
Community Psychology

Faculty Profile

DR. SHAYDA KAFAI

“

**I AM ALIVE,
PRESENT, AND
THRIVING
BECAUSE OF MY
MENTORS.**



My education journey has been nourished by the support of mentors. I was fortunate to have found community who challenged and supported me, and who reminded me that I belonged. My journey began at Pierce Community College in the San Fernando Valley. I transferred to Cal State Northridge where I completed by B.A. and M.A. in English (emphasis in creative writing). Because of the focus of my thesis—gender and disability studies—I entered a Cultural Studies PhD program at Claremont Graduate University. I had finally found my academic home.

The root of my motivation are my learners and my communities. The co-creation of knowledge, of sharing knowledge, and the mutual education that happens in the classroom is what sustains me. It is my intention as an educator to create a classroom culture that nourishes questioning and empowers growth. My experience as a disabled, queer of color educator-scholar informs this practice, and it is always my learners who drive me to create and ensure spaces of safety, accessibility, and inclusivity.

I am alive, present, and thriving because of my mentors. During every stage of my academic journey, I was supported. I am the beneficiary of knowledge, time, support, and energy from my community of mentors. I would not be where I am without them, their check-ins, their advice, and their insistence that, despite it all, I persist. Because of my own experiences with mentorship, I knew that I wanted to center mentoring in my own practice. For me, mentoring is a political act of love and resilience.

It has been an honor and gift to be a McNair mentor. I have, and continue to, work with phenomenal researchers-scholars who are engaged and committed to their academic work. In addition to being a McNair mentor, I am also supporting our McNair Scholars who are preparing for graduate school. This particular role has given me incredible joy. Bearing witness to this transitional phase and providing feedback to students as they prepare their statements of purpose and personal statements has been a profound experience.

Alumni Profile

DR. ANNA STORTI

I entered Cal Poly Pomona as a Civil Engineering major. I was inspired by environmental feminists and wanted to build a career with a focus on hydraulics. I quickly came to realize how much I craved the interpersonal dynamics that are accented in the humanities and social sciences. Off campus, I worked as an assistant manager at the local Yogurtland, which prompted me to switch to Business Administration. Soon, I found myself in a general education course in Ethnic and Women's Studies. I was immediately hooked. For the first time, the classroom was a haven rather than an obstacle I had to pass through in order to earn a degree. By the end of my second year, I took on a minor in Women's Studies. It was not until I began working at the Violence Prevention & Women's Resource Center that I evolved my minor into a double major in Gender, Ethnicity, and Multicultural Studies (GEMS). It was in the GEMS classroom where my nascent interests in race, gender, and social justice were met by professors who were invested not only in the education of underrepresented students, but in our futures. GEMS gave me the language to articulate historical disadvantages, igniting my interest in pursuing a future in research.

My advisor, Dr. Anita Jain, encouraged me to apply to McNair. As a McNair Scholar, I used queer theory to study the relationship between queer femininity and racial passing. My research welcomed praise as I was honored with a First Place prize at the 27th Annual California State University Research Competition and a McNair Graduate Fellowship to pursue a PhD at the University of Maryland, College Park.



At Maryland, I expanded my research to include an analysis of mixed race Asian Americans. My dissertation focused on Asian American feminist politics from the late 19th century to the present, examining a wide array of aesthetic forms to address issues of sexual violence, embodied memory, and the colonial condition. In particular, I situated feminist and queer theory alongside Asian Americanist critique to analyze the colonial legacies of racialized desire. During my doctoral training, I had the opportunity to create and teach my own courses. I taught across gender and sexuality studies, media studies, and English. In my teaching, I draw on my research's interdisciplinary investments through an emphasis on sexuality, performance, and cultural production.

Alumni Profile (cont.)

DR. ANNA STORTI

As the first member in my family to earn a PhD, I felt, and still feel, immensely grateful and indebted to those who came before me. Family, friends, and scholars offered a guiding light that emblazons each page of my dissertation. I am the product of multiple migrations and I continue to conduct research with the aim to uncover histories that have been forgotten.

I defended my dissertation on April 1, 2020, just weeks after COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic. I was looking forward to defending and celebrating in person with my committee and department at Maryland. While I struggled to plan for a remote defense, the unseen benefit was that I was able to invite family and friends to tune in from across the world—including Manila, Vancouver, and all over the US. My advisor sent me a gift basket with champagne and snacks. My partner surprised me with flowers and cake. Friends stayed on Zoom afterwards to raise a glass with me. Even though it was not what I imagined it would be, the experience of presenting your work and defending in front of your colleagues and family is unmatched, no matter if its online or in-person.

I always enjoyed the cross-disciplinary interactions that enliven each McNair Scholar's meeting. I met people who conducted research in fields I knew little about. Watching how others conduct research and arrive at conclusions continues to help me think in interdisciplinary realms. I also had such an impactful experience over the summer when my McNair cohort attended the Annual McNair Conference at UC Berkeley. We supported each other as we presented our work and sat

in on panels offering advice on how to apply to graduate school. On one day of the conference, I had the honor to deliver a plenary presentation. It was an invigorating and memorable experience to be able to share my research in a large lecture hall in front of McNair scholars from across the country. I hold that experience at Berkeley close in my mind, as it still manages to ignite what I find most crucial about research: a cultivation of knowledge that nourishes collaboration while fostering change.

Schedule, plan, stay committed to the process. Surround yourself with kind, generous scholars. Establish relationships outside of academia. There will be moments when you doubt yourself, but view these times as anticipated challenges and not as representations of your value or worth. My amazing McNair advisor, Dr. Jain, gave me a piece of advice that I continue to reflect upon when I'm struggling in my work. The PhD is a training program, not simply a measure of intelligence. We are being molded to think critically within a particular school of thought, and as much as we rely on our minds, we must also put in the time to acknowledge the long histories of our respective fields. Joining a scholarly conversation may seem intimidating, but I hope you begin to view research as one way to work towards a better world.

Annual McNair Scholars Research Symposium

On April 23, 2020, we hosted the annual McNair Scholars Research Symposium via Zoom. For the majority of our scholars, this was their first time presenting their research on a virtual platform, and they showed great resiliency as they adapted to the new format. Though we were unfortunately unable to host the in-person reception and medal ceremony, the virtual nature of this event made it possible for about 50 faculty, friends, and family members to attend the symposium from the safety of their own homes. We look forward to more virtual events in the future so that friends and alumni of the program can participate from anywhere in the world!

If you are interested in attending the 2021 Annual McNair Scholars Research Symposium, please email the McNair office at mcnair@cpp.edu.



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.

Thank you for your support!

To donate to the CPP McNair Scholars Program,
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