Apply Today!
- McNair Scholars applications are due 04/05/2020 for qualifying juniors.
- McNair Explorers applications are open for incoming freshmen and sophomores.
- Apply at https://www.depts.ttu.edu/diversity/mcnair

About Karina
I am a Mechanical Engineering major with a double minor in Spanish & Mathematics. I have been part of the Engineering Diplomats for the past two years. My hobbies include learning sign language, binge-watching anime, and creating robots.

Her Research Interests
I am currently researching walking and climbing robots with heuristic genetic algorithms. I have always loved the robotics field and wanted to expand my knowledge and capabilities in this area. I hope to continue pursuing this field when I enter graduate school.

Grad School Plans
I have been accepted to a research internship at Oregon State University where I will be investigating haptic wearable robotics. I wanted to have more experience in this field before applying to grad school in the fall of my senior year. My goal is to obtain a Ph.D. and post-doc, so I can become a researcher and a professor at the university level.

Why She Loves McNair
McNair has given me great insight into the graduate school world. I appreciate being part of an organization recognized by graduate programs. I believe being part of this program has greatly influenced me to pursue a Ph.D. At first, I wasn’t sure if I had the capabilities to pursue another degree, but McNair has given me the support and motivation to do so. I will be forever grateful for all the opportunities they have given me.

— Karina Puente

Looking Back:
Lessons from Past McNair Scholars
The nationwide McNair Scholars Program is rigorous—under the tutelage of McNair directors and faculty mentors, Scholars learn what it takes to do research and earn advanced degrees. However, the road to graduate school is a long one. Uncertainty, imposter’s syndrome, and disappointments sometimes slow Scholars’ ability to move forward.

TTU McNair Scholars are part of a legacy left by the many McNair graduates before them—they are not the only ones to blaze paths into graduate schools for first-generation students, nor will they be the last. Reflecting on the stories of previous McNair Scholars is one way to adopt a mindset of success and gain greater perspective on the valuable experiences available to students in the McNair Scholars Program.

To explain the role the McNair Scholars Program played in his own life, Texas Tech McNair Alum, Dr. Michael Gomez, described the McNair Scholars Program as “Roger Bannisters for Education.” Roger Bannister’s legacy is being the first person to run a mile in under four minutes. After he did it, there have been hundreds of people who have done it, and that’s because he broke that perceptual barrier. Now high school students have run a mile in under four minutes, and it’s just a kind of normal thing to do. McNair breaks the 4-minute mile for Scholars. They give Scholars a different paradigm to see the world through in terms of their own education.”

And it’s true: McNair Scholars are given a new paradigm for seeing their education and potential. The TTU McNair Scholars Program asked some of the McNair Alumni teaching at our campus to share how being a McNair Scholar helped them get where they are today. (See page 2 for their stories.)

— Rebekah Smith
Dr. Michael Gomez  
Licensed Psychologist|Assistant Professor  
McNair Alma Mater Texas Tech University  

The one sentence version is I would not be a doctor without McNair. Period. Essentially in statistical terminology, I’m an outlier. If you put me into a data base, the statistics would pop out incarceration and drug addiction given the data you input into the system. It does not pop out “Doctor.” Where I grew up at on the east side of Lubbock, Texas Tech was like Oxford to us; you’d have to be the smartest person in the world to go there. We actually see it as a very hopeful place, but the question through my pipeline was “If you’re going to college.” When you’re from my side of town you’re asked if. But the entity of McNair was just where. They were saying, “Where are you going to go?” not if. I never at any point in my recollection heard if I was going to go to graduate school or if I was going to be a doctor. They took the word if out, which I heard my whole life, and put where into that sentence. They got me where I am. Period. There is no ambiguity, no equivocation. They were the ones who were there every day, concretely moving me in that direction.

Dr. Dave Louis  
Associate Professor of Educational Psychology  
McNair Alma Mater Morehouse College  

I knew that I wanted to get a doctorate going into my undergrad. Now, did I know what that meant? I had no clue, but that’s what I wanted, that was my aspiration. And that’s not the kind of thing you share with everybody. So, to hear a program echo the idea that I should really be aspiring to a doctorate was refreshing; it was sort of the wind in the sails that I needed. Now in terms of research, again, I had no clue. As a first-generation college student, what is research? I mean you hear about research and the only thing you think about is in a lab, and there I was in the social sciences and people are talking about research, and I had no clue what that even remotely looked like. My first research experience was at the Atlanta Zoo checking the number of individuals going to different play areas in a newly constructed playground, which really seems mundane. But my last experience was with the Center for Disease Control researching women and HIV/AIDS, and I had the opportunity to meet Dr. David Satcher just before he became the Surgeon General. To see that progress meant a lot. What I took away from that was whenever we think about these grand aspirations in our lives, we have to start small, so that’s a lesson that I took from the McNair experience: Start small, end up big, and be patient with the process.

McNair gave me that structure and exposure and understanding of what social science research was. So, combine that exposure and experience with this belief that Scholars need to get a doctorate, and that was the perfect concoction for me.

Dr. Raegan Higgins  
Associate Professor of Mathematics  
McNair Alma Mater Xavier University of Louisiana  

Currently, I am an Associate Professor of Mathematics. Being a McNair Scholar helped me learn how to talk about mathematics. I was one of few McNair Scholars who were math majors. When we practiced our poster presentations or oral presentations, I had to really find a way to make the mathematics relevant and understandable to a broad audience, not just the aspiring mathematicians. That is a skill that I continue to use and improve upon as I present my research and advise and teach students. As a McNair Scholar, I was also able to visit prospective graduate schools. Those visits are my most memorable experience. I was able to talk to current graduate students and faculty in person. It was so much better than reading an email response or reading a brochure. I could see the graduate students’ body language; were they thriving or were they barely holding on? I could see how they interacted and where they studied. Those trips really helped me choose a graduate program.

Director’s Corner  

I am truly thankful for the chance to be a part of the McNair Scholars Program at Grand Valley State University. It paved my scholarly career entirely, and I do not know if I would be where I am today without McNair. Currently, I am a Ph.D. candidate in TTU’s Higher Education Research program – so, it definitely works. Being able to conduct research as an undergrad, having a mentor to guide you, working with McNair staff that fully supports you, and having access to resources (research and travel funding, free GRE prep, professional development, grad school advice) all in one place is such a life changing experience. I have had the privilege to be both a McNair Scholar and now work administratively for the program. It’s pretty cool to think that now I get to take everything I’ve learned, pay it forward, and prepare our future Ph.D.’s on their journey; it’s been an honor.

— LaTricia Phillips