

# McNair Scholars



POST-BACCALAUREATE  
ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

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## *McNair News:*

- *Nine UWO McNair scholars graduate in 2020!  
Seven go straight on to graduate school!*
- *Fifteen to participate in the 2020 McNair Cohort!*
- *35% UWO McNair alumni have completed graduate degrees!  
66% are enrolled in or have completed graduate degrees!*

# TRIO

RONALD E. MCNAIR  
POST-BACCALAUREATE  
ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

**UWO**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
OSHKOSH

# A Message from the Director



*Cordelia Bowlus, M.Ed, MA  
Program Director*

Welcome to the Spring 2020 McNair newsletter! While the COVID-19 shutdown is adversely impacting and exacerbating barriers and inequities in our society, our scholars' collective resilience and determination continue to be a deep source of inspiration and hope.

Nine of our scholars are part of the class of 2020, and seven will be going straight on to graduate school. Many have received thousands of dollars in fellowships, tuition remission, and assistantships. Two will be taking time to work as CNAs and medical scribes in preparation to pursue graduate degrees in the medical fields in 2021. Like all of us in the McNair community, the cancellation of national conferences and in-person graduation ceremonies have been hugely disappointing, but it is a reality that can be assuaged by the fact that our scholars' educational journey will continue well beyond the bachelor's degree.

Our 2020 research cohort is fifteen scholars strong and gearing up for an intense summer of research, writing, GRE prep, and some virtual graduate school visits. In fact, we are hoping that with everything online, we might be able "to visit" more schools than is normally possible! I feel incredibly grateful to have been able to build a relationship with our current 2020 scholars prior to the shutdown. We miss our conference-room sojourns but are buoyed by our Teams meetings, which are serving to keep us motivated as we navigate new challenges. As anyone who has engaged in research knows, the best-laid plans do indeed often go awry, and it is only through sheer resolve and ingenuity, through our willingness to consider a plan B or even C, that we prevail. Indeed, our current cohort has already gotten a crash course in this old reality, consulting with me and their mentors to find innovative ways to redesign their projects. Without a doubt, it is what our scholars are doing despite, rather than because of, COVID-19 that will be critical in redefining our post-COVID world.

With gratitude,  
Cordelia

## Meet the new Program Assistant



*Amechia Matthews, MSE  
Program Assistant*

Please join me in welcoming Amechia Matthews, who took on the position as McNair Program Assistant with grace last summer, our most hectic time of year. She has distinguished herself as a kind and thoughtful colleague and has brought a wealth of personal, educational, and work experience to our office. Having participated in Gear Up, a high school TRIO program, she made the decision to move to Oshkosh from Milwaukee in 2011 to be the first in her family to pursue a college degree. Nine years later, Amechia not only holds a bachelor's in sociology and a master's in counseling, but she and her husband have made Oshkosh their home and are the proud parents of a two-year-old with another one on the way. Her years of experience as a student and in work-study positions on campus coupled with her passion for helping our students make their way through their educational journeys have enriched our McNair Program, and for this, we are grateful!

# *Introducing the 2020 McNair Cohort*

**Megan Elger** (Hartford, WI), a communication studies major, will conduct research in the area of interpersonal communication. She and her mentor Prof. Jennifer Considine will focus on student parents, examining the role communication plays in constructing and managing tensions.

**Matthew Frisch** (Rio, WI), a dual-degree seeking student with majors in physics and engineering technology and a math minor, only recently joined the cohort. His research in the field of physics will be conducted under Prof. Nenad Stojilovic. Stay tuned!

**Janaya Godfrey** (Fond du Lac, WI), a criminal justice major with minors in African American studies and political science, will be looking at the role racial resentment plays in attitudes towards the restoration of felon rights.

**Bryece Herlache** (Greenleaf, WI), a kinesiology major with an emphasis in strength and conditioning, is working with Prof. Brian Wallace to better understand the role complex training time deviation plays in athletic performance.

**Amanda Amanda Martinez** (New London, WI), a social work major with minors in social justice and Spanish, will work with Prof. Jeremiah Bohr to examine the relationship between participation in pre-college programs and academic performance in college.

**Dorothy Mitchell** (Phoenix, IL), a bio-chemistry major, will work with Prof. Kedrowski. Together they will explore laboratory procedures that will allow for polymers to be more sustainably produced.

**Raiden Montero** (Gridley, CA), a history and Japanese major, will work with Professor Michael Jasinski to understand the role the emperor's divinity has historically played in Japan's social hierarchy and what that means for the country in the 21st century.

**Nick Morrissey** (Neenah, WI), a philosophy major with a minor in art history and a certificate in ethics, will work with Prof. Michael Van Esler to understand the connection between Metamoderism and new digital art forms such as vaporwave.



2020 McNair Scholars at the annual WISys Quick Pitch listening to UWO students and 2019 McNair scholars pitch their research.

**Jessica Plascencia** (Green Bay, WI), a psychology and Spanish major with a minor in social justice, will work with Prof. Justyna Olszewska to examine the phonological similarity effect in bilingual speakers.

**Brianna Roberts** (Beaver Dam, WI) a kinesiology major, will conduct research with Prof. Brian Wallace in the area of biomechanics, examining the connection between football helmet design and concussions.

**Karely Rodriguez** (Rice Lake, WI), a psychology major with minors in social justice, criminal justice, and Spanish, will work with Prof. Justyna Olszewska to better understand how testing formats can interfere with memory performance.

**Sydney Schmidt** (Kaukauna, WI), a psychology major with a minor in neuroscience, will work with Dr. Aggie Hanni to decipher the degree to which students on the autism spectrum are coping within the less structured environment of college.

**Stacey Sparks** (Neenah, WI), an English education major, will work with Prof. Pascale Manning to examine the different psychological states in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*.

**Hannah Tynan** (Rosendale, WI), a history major, will work with Prof. Gabriel Loiacono to identify factors which have prevented the Brothertown Inditan Nation from being officially recognized as a tribe by the Federal Government.

**Mylo Wilkins** (Milwaukee, WI), a biochemistry major with a minor in microbiology, will work with Prof. Eric Matson to understand the role microorganisms play in gut ecology of termites.

*The start of another great summer with another great group of scholars !*



# Campus & Community-Based Research

*Increasingly, UWO McNair scholars and their mentors are taking on research projects utilizing data collected or interviews conducted on our campus or in our community.*

*These are exciting projects that not only give our scholars real-world research opportunities but also allow them to draw attention to issues and to potentially effect change right here on our campus and in the community.*

It is not uncommon for McNair scholars to do research involving UWO students. Psychology professors' and their mentees' studies often rely on running student participants. What is unique is that in the past two years, several UWO McNair scholars and their mentors have taken on research projects inspired by an interest in programs and/or demographic groups right here in our immediate community. In doing so they are reaching out to local experts, conducting interviews/surveys with UWO students, utilizing extant data sets, and/or collecting data right here in our greater campus community.

## 2019:

**Joy Evans** (featured below) looked at UW Oshkosh student health data collected using the National College Health Assessment (NCHA) to examine the connection between overall health and food insecurity amongst students of color on our campus. Her project drew increased attention to the issue of food insecurity and landed her a position as the director of The Cabinet, our campus' first food pantry. **Stacey Sparks** took a close look at UWO Head Start data to decipher what outside factors might limit a child's ability to get the most out of this high-impact program. **Mia Wilson** conducted interviews with UWO students to identify the challenges faced by students of color at this predominately white institution.

## 2020:

This summer, **Megan Elger** hopes to interview UWO parents to better understand the roll communication plays in managing work-family tensions, a challenge that for Elger, a mother of six, has become even more salient with the COVID shutdown. **Amanda Martinez**—having benefited from the UWO PreCollege Program as a high school student and later worked for the program two summers—is driven by a desire to understand the impact of precollege programs like ours. **Sydney Schmidt** plans to work with the Accessibility Center to better understand to what extent UWO students on the Autism spectrum are adapting to college.



<https://advancetitan.com/news/2019/10/10/food-pantry-to-open-in-reeve-union>



# Alumni Spotlight

## Katie Proctor

When the 2016 McNair scholars and I (the newly appointed McNair Program Director) attended the National Undergraduate Research Conference at the University of Memphis in 2017, we had the honor of meeting **Katie Proctor**, a 2015 McNair Scholar, who was just getting going with her graduate work in earth sciences with an emphasis in anthropology. Today Proctor is already finishing up her PhD coursework!



Together with her mentor, Associate Professor Andrew M. Mickelson, she is working on a project that examines agricultural settlement systems in west Tennessee from AD 900–1600 and builds off the results of archaeological surveys and excavations conducted over the past 10 years. As a first-generation college student, Proctor says she felt out of place in some academic settings but admits that it does get easier! She now feels at home in her academic department at the University of Memphis where she is able to grow as a researcher. Going to the CRITA conference pushed her out of her comfort zone, but she admits it wasn't so bad after all: *"Everyone wants you to do well, everyone has been in your shoes at one point or another, and the worst-case scenario will likely not be the outcome."*

More information about Katie Proctor's research can be found at West Tennessee Archaeological Project-WTAP on Facebook.

## Monika Greco



Monika has committed to the University of Pennsylvania where she will be pursuing a PhD in Philosophy beginning in the fall of 2020! Monika was awarded 100% tuition remission as well as a stipend of \$31,000 per year for five years, \$5,000 in summer funding, and health insurance. Her package includes two years on fellowship, two years as a teaching assistant, and one year developing and teaching her own course.

Monika's journey to Penn was earned with pure grit and resilience. She not only distinguished herself at UWO as a McNair scholar and an honors student, receiving the Chancellor's Award in 2017, but she was a much beloved student employee in residence life. She went on to pursue a master's in philosophy at Tufts, and for the past year she has been gaining valuable experience as a legal research assistant for prominent Boston civil liberties attorney Harvey Silverglate. We look forward to continuing to follow Monika as she pursues her love of philosophy in the context of law, educational policy, and theory.

# McNair Alumni News

## *Congratulations to the following McNair Alumni:*



*Aminata Bojang,  
Graduate School Bound  
2018 Cohort*

After taking one year off to gain valuable experience working in a veterinary clinic, Aminata Bojang applied and was admitted to two extraordinarily competitive vet schools: the University of Minnesota and the University of Wisconsin. She has committed to UW Madison.



*Deseray Aguirre, D.O  
Doctorate of  
Osteopathy, 2020  
2010 Cohort*

Deseray Aguirre will start her residency as a family medicine resident physician in Milwaukee this summer. She has completed all the necessary work to gain her Doctor of Osteopathy.



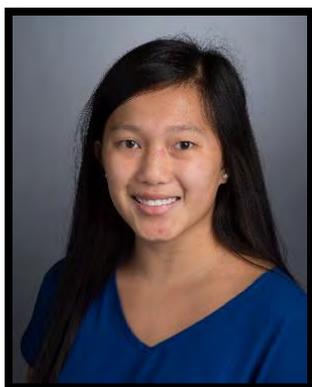
*Alyssa Scott, M.S  
Master of Science, 2020  
2017 Cohort*

Alyssa Scott graduated from Marquette University with a master's in psychology. Her next goal is to begin working in her field of behavioral analysis.



*Rilee Zeinert, PhD  
Post Doctoral training  
at National Institute of  
Health  
2013 Cohort*

Rilee Zeinert has successfully defended his Ph.D thesis in molecular and cellular biology. Rilee will continue his journey at the National Institute of Health in Washington D.C.



*Amanda Vue, MSW  
Masters of Social Work, 2020  
2018 Cohort*

Amanda Vue received her MSW from the University of Wisconsin Madison this spring! She will begin her career in social work this summer.

You did it!  
*Congratulations*

# *Undergraduate Degrees Awarded*

## December 2019 Graduates



*Brenna Prieto*

*Major: Psychology  
Minor: Spanish*

*2019 Cohort*

Brenna Prieto will be completing a master's in industrial psychology online through the University of New Hampshire. She hopes to complete her degree in 1.5 years.



*Khaila Miles-Semmons*

*Major: English  
Minor: African American Studies*

*2018 Cohort*

Khaila Miles-Semmons has committed to the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, where she will be pursuing a master's in English. Khaila is a recipient of the coveted Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellowship, which includes a stipend of \$15,000, tuition remission, low-cost comprehensive health benefits, and a \$1,000 travel award. She has also been awarded the \$5,000 UWM Chancellor's Graduate Student Award, intended to attract "graduate students with exceptional academic records and high promise of future success."



You did it!  
*Congratulations*

## May 2020 Graduates



*Joy Evans*

*Major:  
Environmental  
Science*

*2019 Cohort*

Joy Evans has committed to the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee's School of Public Health. Joy is a recipient of the coveted Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellowship, which includes a stipend of \$15,000, tuition remission, low-cost comprehensive health benefits, and a \$1,000 travel award.



*Jason Lopez*

*Major: Biology  
Minor: Chemistry*

*2018 Cohort*

Jason Lopez will gain experience working as a medical scribe in preparation for medical school.



*Rachel McKay*

*Major: Biology*

*2019 Cohort*

Rachel McKay will continue to work as a CNA in preparation for applying to physician assistant programs.



*Braini McKenzie*

*Major: Educatio  
Minors: Psychology &  
Mathematics*

*2019 Cohort*

Braini McKenzie will be attending the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in the fall, where she will pursue a master's degree in higher education. She was awarded the Rackham Fellowship, which will cover 100% of the cost of tuition for the first year and includes health insurance and a stipend of \$10,890 per semester.

You did it!  
*Congratulations*

A large, stylized yellow star graphic with a black outline, positioned behind the word 'Congratulations'.

## May 2020 Graduates



*Katelyn Wulff*  
*Major: Nursing*  
*Global Scholar*  
*Certificate*  
*2018 Cohort*

Katelyn Wulff will be attending UWO's competitive nursing program for a Doctorate of Nursing.



*Aubrey Wzientek*  
*Major: Kinesiology*  
*2019 Cohort*

Aubrey Wzientek has committed to the University of Wisconsin La-Crosse, where she will be pursuing a master's degree in athletic training.



*Mia Wilson*  
*Major: Political Science*  
*and Women & Gender*  
*Studies*  
*2019 Cohort*

Mia Wilson has committed to Ohio State University, where she will pursue a master's degree in higher education and student affairs. She was awarded an assistantship in the residence halls.

You did it!  
*Congratulations*



# *McNair Showcase*

## *September 20, 2019*

The annual McNair Scholars Showcase is an opportunity for scholars to present their research to their families, UWO faculty, and prospective McNair scholars. The event is held on campus at the Culver Family Welcome Center.



Front row from left to right: Scholars Elias Flor Martinez, Joy Evans, Rachel McKay, Doua Xiong, Megan Elger, Stacey Sparks.

Back row from left to right: Scholars Aubrey Wzientek, Mia Wilson, Angel Camacho, Riley Drechsler, Malykee Hall, Brenna Prieto, and McNair Director Cordelia Bowlus

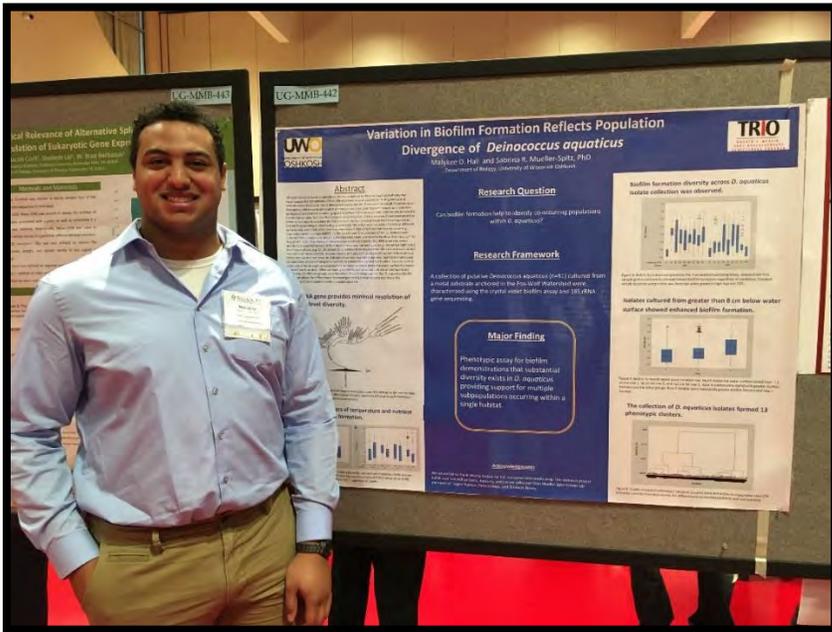


*Elias Flor Martinez*



*Angel Camacho*

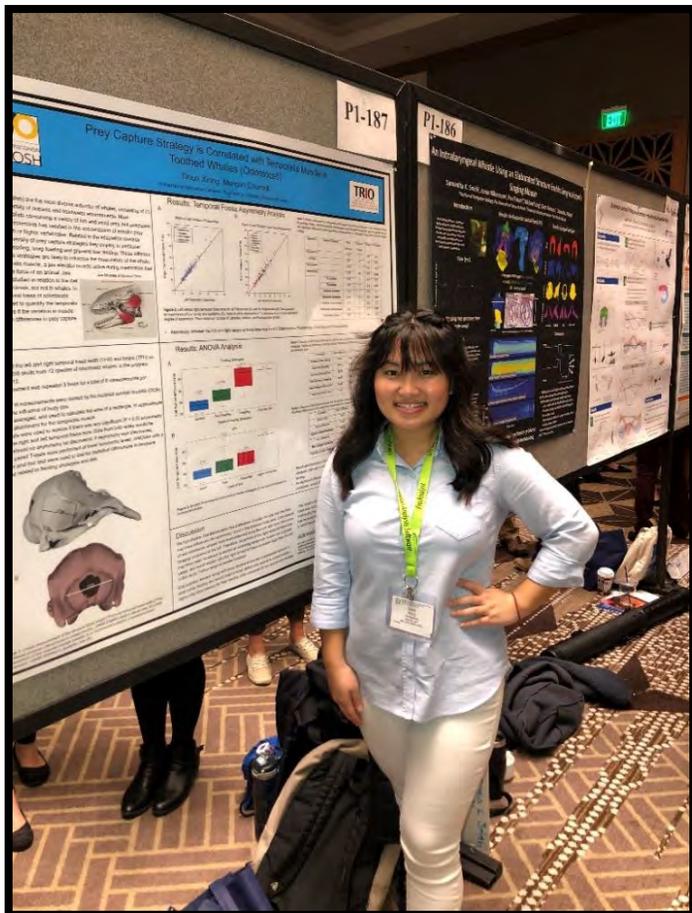
# Scholar Presentations



## Sigma XI Conference November 16, 2019

Maylkee Hall attended the Sigma XI conference in Madison, Wisconsin. Sigma XI is an international organization which promotes research in science and engineering.

*"I feel that being at a conference emphasizes the skills needed in terms of communicating, having the confidence, and translating your information to others in a way that can be relatable no matter the topic of research. The impact that this conference has had for myself moving forward is being motivated to attend other conferences and connect with other researchers."* - Malykee Hall



## Society for Integrative & Comparative Biology Conference January 2-8, 2020

Doua Xiong participated in the Society for Integrative & Comparative Biology (SICB) conference in Austin, Texas.

*"I spent the new year presenting my research at The Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology Conference hosted in Austin, Texas. It was my first time traveling alone and I was a bit scared and intimidated. I didn't know anyone and knew that I'd be surrounded by PhD students and scientists from prestigious universities. I definitely felt like an imposter. However, this whole week being here made me realize that I am a scholar, scientist and filled with potential just like everyone else. It's also so amazing to see so many researchers from all over the country and world! (Fun fact: shark skin are actually scales made from the same material as their teeth and these scales replace themselves). I want to thank the UW Oshkosh McNair Program and the Biology Department for funding my trip to this incredible conference."* - Doua Xiong

## Research in the Rotunda

March 11, 2020

Angel Camacho, Megan Elger, Brenna Prieto, and Stacey Sparks attended the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Research in the Rotunda at UW Madison.



*“It was an amazing experience. I was able to present my research in the Wisconsin State Capitol where so much work is done and so many decisions are made that affect the lives of people in our state. To be in that environment, presenting what I have researched gave me a great sense of agency. Individuals can make a difference, especially when they come together in community places with a shared sense of work and vision. [My advice is to]take one day at a time and one opportunity at a time. I could not have envisioned myself standing at Research in the Rotunda over a year ago when I started my research, but one day's work at a time led to a great moment of learning and experience”.- Stacey*

## 44<sup>th</sup> Annual National Council for Black Studies

March 11-14, 2020

McNair scholars Joy Evans, Janaya Godfrey, and Mia Wilson had the great honor of presenting their research along with five other UWO students at the National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) in Atlanta, GA. They were accompanied by Professor Alphonso Simpson, UWO's Director of African American Studies and NCSB Executive Board member.



# Research & Scholarly Activity on the UWO Campus

## WISys Quick Pitch Competition

March 19, 2020

WISys, an independent, nonprofit supporting organization for UW System, has as its mission the advancement of scientific research and the transfer of technology to companies capable of developing them to benefit Wisconsin and beyond. The organization also works to inspire the next generation of researchers and innovators by recruiting WiSys student ambassadors and hosting events such as the Quick Pitch Competition, during which “participants have three minutes to impress a panel of judges with their research and their ability to articulate its larger importance. Winners receive cash prizes and a chance to secure a spot in the Quick Pitch State Final.”



This year eight McNair Scholars participated in the event: Riley Drechsler, Joy Evans, Elias Flor Martinez, Jason Lopez, Rachel McKay, Braini McKenzie, Brenna Prieto and Stacey Sparks. Scholars Sparks and Evans placed second and third, respectively.

## Oshkosh Scholar



The research of two 2019 McNair scholars were published in the 2020 *Oshkosh Scholar*, a faculty-reviewed journal.

Khaila Miles-Semons (Michelle Kuhl, History), “Together but Unequal: Perceptions on the White-Black Sisterhood from 1830 to 1870”

Sarah Reed (Paul Van Auken, Sociology), “Environmental Factors and Refugee Resettlement Success in Oshkosh and the Fox Valley”

## Celebration of Scholarship

April 30-May 1, 2020

The Celebration of Scholarship is a major annual spring event on our campus during which 80 to 100 UWO students present their research, display art, and perform. This year the COVID shutdown could have resulted in the cancellation of this event, but thanks to the vision of Dr. Stephen Kercher, Director of the Office of Student Research and Creative Activity (OSRCA) and the innovation of the University Marketing and Communications team, the Celebration of Scholarship was moved to an online setting! Eleven McNair scholars participated in the poster presentations. Scholar Mylo Wilkens placed fourth.



# Closing Remarks

## Words of wisdom from the 2019 McNair Scholars

What being part of McNair has taught me:

*“McNair has been a positive experience . . . both academically and emotionally. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity has not only prepared me for graduate school but has challenged me in ways I have never been challenged before.”*—Brenna Prieto, psychology

*“I spent countless hours collecting data and measuring samples which were very painstaking. At the time, I was not sure if I could finish my research, but completing the research empowered me. This process demonstrated to me that I can achieve and complete difficult tasks and that if I work hard, I can reach my goals.”*—Elias Flor Martinez, biology

*“The program forced me out of my comfort zone in many ways and taught me that I am capable of much more than I anticipated. Being recommended as a potential scholar, flying cross-country alone to collect data, and giving a 30-minute presentation on my own research were never things I imagined myself being capable of, but I accomplished them all over the course of the summer. . . The combination of graduate school information and research opportunities . . . have undoubtedly set me up for success both in graduate school and in a future career.”*—Riley Drechsler, anthropology



*“Completing a research project has allowed me to improve my writing and critical thinking skills in ways that I truly never expected. It is one thing to say you learned new things, but truly developing new habits and skills takes a lot of hard work and dedication. I think that acquiring these skills has given me the extra boost I need to prepare for graduate school.”*—Joy Evans, environmental health

*“This program is challenging and there were times when I wanted to give up, but the benefits truly outweigh the costs. I can’t overstate my gratitude for the individuals that run this program and I hope that it continues to thrive for many years to come!”*—Megan Elger, communication studies

# Thank you!

Each year we strive to meet the needs of our scholars by making graduate school visits and providing seminars and workshops on a range of topics including GRE prep, financial literacy, and graduate application planning. While these are essential components of their success, the cornerstone of the program remains the summer research internship, which would not exist were it not of the support of a wide range of faculty members.

Thank you to the 2019 McNair research mentors and instructional faculty!

Benjamin Artz, PhD, economics

Morgan Churchill, PhD, biology

Adrienne Frie, PhD, anthropology

Juliana Kahrs, MPH, public health

Laura Jean Baker, MFA, English

Michael Jasinski, PhD, political science

Jessica Lucas, PhD, biology

Robert Mitchell, PhD, biology

Yoko Mogi-Heinz, EdD, education

Sabrina Mueller-Spitz, PhD, biology

Heidi Nicholls, PhD, anthropology

Justyna Olszewska, PhD, psychology

James Paulson, PhD, chemistry

Brian Wallace, PhD, kinesiology

Kristi Wilkum, PhD, communications

The McNair Scholars Program is a federally funded TRIO program designed to increase graduate degree attainment for students from underrepresented groups. McNair participants are high-achieving undergraduates, who are first-generation college students with financial need and/or members of a group that is traditionally underrepresented in graduate education.

To learn more about McNair and what our program has to offer, please visit us at <https://uwosh.edu/mcnairscholars/>



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