

UCSB MCNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

Fall 2022/Winter 2023, VOL. 20



McNAIR



SCHOLARS PROGRAM UCSB

The UCSB McNair Scholars Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Education Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, UCSB Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and, deans of the College of Letters and Sciences.



Faculty Director
Miroslava Chávez-García, Ph.D.

NOTE FROM THE Faculty Director

New Outreach, Recruitment Efforts, and More!

Greetings UCSB community! What a whirlwind of events we've had in fall 2022 and winter 2023. In fall, we attended an undergraduate research conference at Pepperdine University where we met NASA Astronaut Jose Hernandez. We also led McNair scholars along with a group of UCSB undergraduates to a diversity forum for graduate education at the Long Beach Convention Center. We welcomed, too, a new cohort of McNair scholars – five juniors – all of whom bring strengths and diverse profiles in humanities, social sciences, and STEM fields.

With the assistance of McNair's co-PI, Dr. Vanessa Woods, we launched a pre-McNair Program for 2022-2023. In fall, we hosted two workshops aimed at first-gen, low-income, and underrepresented students on the topic of "what is

research?" In winter, we co-taught an "INT" course aimed at assisting transfer students and sophomores on how to apply to McNair. More than just "filling in the blanks," Vanessa developed the curriculum with the idea of helping students to dig deep and identify the strengths that they have cultivated in their families, communities, and educational experiences. The goal is to have students recognize the cultural assets they bring to academia and to use those as a launching pad to explore their passions and research interests. We're proud to say that we received a particularly robust set of applications and a deep pool of applicants in winter 2023. We look forward to welcoming our new sophomores and transfer students in spring quarter.

With spring already underway and summer quickly approaching, we look forward

to where our graduating seniors will land. Many have already received news of acceptances to colleges and universities around the country. We wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors. We also anxiously await the summer ramp-up of research activities for our rising seniors and rising juniors. While some will be going away to summer research programs, others will stay on campus and join us for our programming. We also plan to provide free summer housing, as last year, for the eight-week program. Thanks to Summer Sessions for partnering with us to provide that foundational component of the summer program. Reach out to us however you see fit. We look forward to hearing from you. You all make the UCSB McNair Scholars Program possible.



Program Director
Veronica L. Fematt, Ph.D.

Note from the Program Director Building Transferable Skills

McNair Scholars have been busy! Last fall, we introduced McNair Scholars to alternative-academic career paths by inviting a panel of professionals with doctorate degrees to share their experience working in the banking, tech, and nonprofit industries. A recurring theme centered on the importance of transferable skills. As the Program Director, I recognize the importance of exposing

McNair Scholars to a variety of research tools/software and providing them with hands-on learning opportunities (e.g., developing an interview protocol/creating a survey) that will make them stronger applicants to ever increasingly competitive graduate programs. To that end, in winter 2023, I formed a partnership with colleagues from the DREAM Lab (formerly Carpentry) to provide a

three-part workshop series, "Introduction to Data Analysis with R Studio for Social Science" to McNair students. I'm also excited to launch two new workshops into the spring curriculum, an "Introduction to Survey Development," and an "Introduction to Qualtrics" workshop. Stay tuned for more developments.



Welcome New Juniors



Jada Alexander
Environmental Studies
Mentor: Dr. Adrian Stier
Research Interests: Coastal Marine Ecosystems



Genesis Hernandez
Psychological & Brain Sciences
Mentor: Dr. Erin Dowdy
Research Interests: Mental Health & Latinx Communities



Jacqueline Lopez
Psychological & Brain Sciences
Mentor Dr. Jill Sharkey
Research Interest: Latinx Mental Health, Culture, Psychopathology, & Treatment Development



Evelyn Isais
English & Religious Studies
Mentor: Dr. Elizabeth Perez
Research Interests: Latinx LDS Converts' Testimonies



Alex Reed
Biopsychology
Mentor: Dr. Karen Szumlinski
Research Interests: Substance Abuse, Neurodegenerative Diseases

McNair Scholar Profiles



Mackenzie Taradalsky

Mackenzie Taradalsky is graduating this spring with two Bachelor of Art degrees, the first in Philosophy: Ethics & Public Policy Concentration and the second in Economics. Additionally, she completed an undergraduate certificate in Technology Management. When in graduate school, she plans to study systemic racism within U.S. government policies and institutions. Her research interests are heavily inspired by her personal background, and she explains that “as an African, LGBTQ, and Jewish woman, people like me are severely underrepresented in influential institutions such as higher education and the federal government; however, intersectional perspectives like mine are

essential for meaningful change. I love that I have the opportunity to understand and develop potential solutions to critical inequality issues.”

She decided to join the McNair Scholars program to further develop her research skills and be surrounded by other motivated peers hoping to pursue their Ph.D. Her favorite thing about being in McNair is the incredible community and friends she made. She feels very grateful to have the support of her fellow scholars and is always excited to see them around campus or out at external social events. She will miss them at graduate school but is excited to see everyone achieve and knows that their pa-

ths will cross again in the future. When asked what she is looking forward to most about graduate school, Mackenzie says, “I love learning, and I am excited to dive deeper into my intended field and develop field-specific skills. I look forward to conducting meaningful research that impacts people’s lives and being a role model for other minority students in the field of higher education and research.” Her plans for next year are to enroll in a Ph.D. program - she is currently considering the University of Washington for a Ph.D. in Public Policy & Administration and Georgetown for a Ph.D. in Government. She is also waiting to hear from several other programs.



Fatima Gonzalez


Fatima Gonzalez is a graduating senior who will receive her Bachelor of Science degree in Psychological & Brain Sciences along with a double minor in Applied Psychology and Philosophy. Her general research interest is clinical psychology with a focus on working with justice-involved youth who have experienced trauma. This passion developed after she started working at a Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP), where she provided direct care to child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Justice-involved youth are disproportionately affected by trauma, and a large amount of the existing clinical research working with this population focuses on recidivism rates (evaluating what factors were involved in regressing). Fatima would like to focus her studies on progressing behavioral health outcomes and expanding positive resources. Ultimately, her goal is to make a substantial contribution to research aimed at comprehending the factors that most effectively support youth within the juvenile justice system. She most recently

worked with patients in this population to study the impact of adverse childhood experience (ACEs) exposure on levels of depression, anxiety, PTSD, anger expression, and self-esteem. This project also investigated the efficacy of a pre-adjudication diversion program depending on the varying degrees of ACE exposure. More specifically, patients received mental health as well as substance use support services. Her work is ongoing, and we are excited to hear more about what she discovers!

Because Fatima knew she wanted to pursue a doctoral degree in psychology, she joined the McNair Scholars program to gain research experience and guidance surrounding the graduate school application process. Her favorite memory while in the McNair Scholars program was presenting at the Southern California Conference for Undergraduate Research (SCCUR 2022) in Malibu, California. Her advice to future scholars is: “take advantage of every single opportunity you encounter, even when you are doubting

yourself or are questioning if you are qualified. Imposter syndrome can be incredibly discouraging, but you might surprise yourself when you are continuously attempting things you never thought you could achieve!”

When at graduate school, Fatima says she looks forward to learning from her mentors, discovering ways in which psychological research can inform policy, and her clinical internship. Her plans for next year are not finalized, and she is still waiting to hear back from several schools. She recently completed interviews for two programs: Palo Alto University’s Ph.D. program in Clinical Psychology (Trauma Emphasis) and the PGSP-Stanford Psy.D. Consortium. She is also considering lab manager and paid research assistant positions in order to gain more experience and be a more competitive applicant in future application cycles as well as increase her chance of receiving greater funding packages.

A portrait of Zingha Foma, a young Black woman with her hair in braids, wearing a black headwrap with orange and white patterns. She is wearing a black top with large, abstract orange and white geometric cutouts. She has a nose ring and a gold necklace with a pendant. The background is a textured, light orange wall.

Zingha Foma

UCSB McNair Scholars Program, Class of 2019

The UCSB McNair Scholars Program is proud to highlight the accomplishments of one of its distinguished alumna, Zingha Foma, who graduated in 2019 with a B.A. in History at UCSB, and is currently a graduate student at New York University (NYU). In the brief time she has been at NYU, Zingha has already received two fellowships. In March 2021, she was awarded the Robert Homes Travel/Research Grant for Africa Fellowship and in September 2019 the McCracken

Fellow award. Zingha's dissertation project is a study of the impact of the transatlantic slave trade on the Gold coast and its inhabitants.

"Specifically," she writes, "it investigates transformation and changes through fashion and sartorial practices by examining social, economic, and cultural dynamics of production, trade, and consumption patterns on the Gold Coast during the eighteenth century. The project will investigate how imports/exports goods influenced the style and dress made and worn, potentially transforming social stratification and the concentration of wealth on the Gold Coast."

In thinking about her experience with the UCSB McNair Scholars Program, Zingha reminisces about the benefits of the program. "McNair introduced me to higher education. Through the program, I was provided resources I would otherwise not have access to as a first generation student. My experience was productive; it helped me feel confident and gave me tools that prepare me for graduate school and continue to be useful in my graduate school experience." We wish Zingha much success with her educational trajectory.

Graduate Mentors



Courtney Durdle Writing Specialist

I am the Writing Specialist at McNair where I assist students with their summer research program and graduate school applications. As part of my position, I also prepare students to be successful in graduate school, specifically strengthening their confidence surrounding their writing ability as well as developing their thinking as research scientists.

Currently, I am pursuing a Ph.D. in Cognitive Neuroscience focusing on memory and decision-making with an application to the legal field (i.e., eyewitness testimony in the form of free recall and photo lineup identifications). I hail from the Bay Area (I moved around so it's hard to identify a hometown), but I did live in Davis for about eight years so I usually say I'm from there since that was the formative time in my life.

I graduated from UC Davis in 2014 with a B.S. in Human Development, B.A. in Psychology, and a minor in Education. As an undergrad, I had the opportunity to work in two labs: one that focused on

memory and development and the other focused on improving learning outcomes for adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). After graduation, I worked at the UC Davis Medical Center (more specifically, the MIND Institute) for four years, completing research focused on helping children (ages 4 - 18 years old) with 22q11.2 Deletion Syndrome (or 22q for short). People with this genetic disorder have an increased risk of developing Schizophrenia, so the main project I assisted with was a five-year longitudinal study attempting to find diagnostic markers to help indicate the development of Schizophrenia. From this experience, I learned to administer and analyze different neuroimaging methods (fMRI and EEG), how to conduct clinical interviews, and work with patient populations along with their families. Concurrently, I decided to volunteer in another lab on the main UC Davis campus in order to diversify my skill set and expose me to psychological research as it is applied to the legal field. When it came time to apply to graduate school, I decided

that I wanted to apply the neuroimaging methods I learned at the UC Davis MIND Institute to the field of psychology and the law (neurolaw).

I grew up in a single-parent, low-income household with many family members struggling with mental illness. This necessitated that I become financially responsible at an early age. I was able to pay for my college degree through financial aid, many private scholarships, and by working several jobs (most of the time simultaneously). My time at UC Davis was extremely formative because I was motivated to balance my many responsibilities and refine my communication skills. At times I did feel lost and discouraged, but the strong sense of community and understanding at UC Davis ultimately empowered me to reach out to others and discover all the potential options after undergrad. I am so grateful to the many incredible mentors I worked with and am dedicated to paying that forward to as many students as possible.



Adeel Hussaini

Graduate Mentor

My name is Adeel Hussaini and I'm a second-year graduate student interested in germ stem cell lineage specification and elucidation. I was raised primarily in Tracy, California, and graduated with a BS in Molecular, Cell, and Developmental Biology from UCSC. My lab experience started when I worked at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, performing cDNA analysis of *Landoltia Punctata*, but have since changed my interests to developmental stem cell biology.

Being raised in America by immigrant parents has opened my eyes to the boundaries and obstacles faced by people of color, minorities, and low-income households. Throughout high school and college, the disparities faced by these marginalized communities has made me realize the need to see people

with similar backgrounds and origins in higher education, and especially in STEM.

As a McNair graduate mentor, I assist the McNair staff in fostering a welcoming, studious, and determined cohort of students to reach their goals of higher education and beyond. I meet one-on-one with students to navigate them through the daunting task of applying to graduate school while excelling in their academics. Additionally, I have led workshops in career development as well as the path to graduate school and what the applications entail. I plan to finish my Masters Degree in Molecular Biology and advance to the biotech industry to ultimately help with T cell therapies for treatment of solid tumors and cancer.



Lexxus Coffey Edison

Graduate Mentor

I am a graduate mentor for the McNair Scholars Program and am currently pursuing an MA/PhD in English with an emphasis in Black Studies and Feminist Studies. My research focuses on 20th and 21st century Black Autobiographical works that grapple with trauma, intraracial antagonisms and how they heal through their autobiographies.

Originally from Palmdale, California, I attended Antelope Valley College and College of the Canyons in Los Angeles County. After completing my Associate's degree in English, I transferred to UC Santa Barbara and completed my B.A. in English with honors. As an undergraduate, I participated in a Faculty Research Assistance Project (FRAP) at UCSB with Dr. Felice Blake, developing the idea of Black Nostalgia by researching rap poetic forms that connected to Black Arts movement era poetic forms. Dr. Blake and I co-presented "These Are The Breaks: The Poetics of Black

Nostalgia," at the 29th Annual Conference on American Literature in 2018. I also presented "The Break Down' on Postwar Urban Poetry" at a McNair conference in Atlanta that year examining the racial break in Black rap and poetry forms.

As a McNair alum and one of the four Black undergraduate students in the UCSB McNair cohort of 2017-2019, I gained the necessary research and presentation skills to help me learn what it means to be an academic. I worked under an Arnold Collaborative Research Grant in 2018 with Punctum, an independent open access publishing company, and co-edited Anti-Racism Inc with Felice Blake, Paula Ioanide, and Alison Reed. I then applied to graduate and chose UCSB because of my faculty mentors and their willingness to assist me on my PhD journey as a creative and critical researcher.

My early childhood has shaped who I have become as a student-scholar. At the age of seven, I was adopted by my biological grandparents, as my biological mother died when I was 14 and was schizophrenic. I have one younger sibling biologically and through adoption I am the youngest of eleven. My family tree is very complicated, and I am the first in my immediate family to pursue a PhD. I think that my personal history shapes my creative writing and academic research, which explores the complexities I saw manifest within my personal life as a Black woman. I believe my research and personal/political life cannot be untwined, for me, the personal is political. My love for my community is also why I work in the Office of Black Student Development and am a board member of the Black Graduate Student Association. My adversity has not always necessarily made me stronger but it has made me smarter.

Pet Corner

At McNair, we love our pets and use them as sources of strength to get us through challenging as well as rewarding moments. We are not alone. Research has shown that pets contribute to positive mental and physical health. These photos of our loving friends show just what a central role they play in our lives. Enjoy!



Dr. Chavez-Garcia's "Chiquita" (aka Chiquis) is striking a pose as the princess of the manor.



Genesis Hernandez's "Snowball": Snowball likes to chase his tail sometimes.



Juno & Mackenzie: Juno loves to walk down Del Playa in all of her favorite outfits



Martha Garcia's "Luna": Luna loves making biscuits and sleeping in boxes!



Eveyn Isaias's "Canela (Nickname: Poop-sie)": Feisty yet sweet dog that demands lots of cuddles and belly scratches



Dr. Fematt's "Bella": Fiercely independent, but will allow her human a cuddle from time to time.



Uni, Cali, and Courtney: Both Uni & Cali have been well trained to perform circus tricks. Courtney's favorite is "Dinosaur" where they stand on their hind legs, walk like a T-Rex, and then take the treat when Courtney says "Rawr!"

McNair

Publications and Awards

■ **Jada Alexander**, a junior, received the African American Scholar of the Aquarium of the Pacific (\$10,000) and Schmidt Family Foundation Award for Environmental Solutions (\$9,000). She was a Research Poster Presenter at Black Women in Ecology, Evolution, and Marine Science (BWEEMS) Conference in Miami, Florida.

■ **Ezequiel Contreras Martinez**, a senior, was awarded a SACNAS Career Pathways Grant, 2023, (\$1000) and selected to present his work at the 2022 SACNAS NDISTEM National Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

■ **Genesis Hernandez**, a junior, received the Waterman Scholarship from the Kern Community Foundation (\$2,500).

■ **Madeleine Pacheco**, a senior, was awarded a Schmidt Family Award for Environmental Solutions (\$9000), Gene and Susan Lucas Research Grant (\$1000), SACNAS Career Pathways Grant (\$1000), and Wenger Scholarship for Environmental Studies (\$2000). She also received Distinction in the Major in the Ecology, Evolution, and Marine Biology (EEMB) Department. Most recently, Maddy was awarded the prestigious National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (\$138,000) to fully fund 3 years of her PhD.

■ **Carla Suarez Soto**, a senior, received an URCA Grant for \$730.

■ **Lucero Torres Ojeda** was awarded a four-year Promise Scholar Scholarship.

■ **Marian Walker** received numerous accolades, including the Gene & Susan Lucas Research Scholarship (\$1000); UCSB Environmental Studies Department Mini-Grant for Undergraduate Research (\$500); URCA Conference Mini-Grant (\$350); High Honors and Distinction in the Environmental Studies Major; a University for Peace (Universidad para la Paz) & Earth Charter International: Leadership, Sustainability, & Ethics Certificate; and, U.S. Congressional Public Service Award for Excellence in Research (awarded by Congressman Salud Carbajal).

■ **Abby Welch** received the UCSB Shoreliners Scholarship, 2022-2023 (\$2000) and was chosen to give a presentation at Georgia Undergraduate Research Symposium in November 2022. She was selected, as well, to participate in the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Summer Research Program, Summer 2023, (\$4500) with stipend, travel, and housing included.

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