

UCSB MCNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

SPRING/SUMMER 2024, VOL. 23



MCNAIR



SCHOLARS PROGRAM UCSB

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WELCOME FROM THE Faculty Director

Hello everyone!

Spring and summer 2024 were both a whirlwind experience for our graduating seniors as well as our continuing sophomores and juniors. In spring, we witnessed eleven students graduate from the McNair Scholars Program, with the majority of them planning to attend graduate school in both doctoral and master's programs. Campuses include University of Nevada, Reno, Harvard, Northeastern, UCSB, and San Diego State University. We're so proud of their achievements! We also had several students decide to take a gap year to explore more intentionally the programs of most interest. One of those students is currently applying to a program at Stanford and has used her extra time to build

the networks that are needed to successfully apply. We wish her and all our alumni the best.

In the summer, our rising seniors and juniors journeyed across northern California, visiting graduate programs, including those at Stanford University and UC Berkeley. Organized in collaboration with the UCLA McNair Scholars Program, the campus tours started at Stanford University where we met with faculty, graduate students, and postdoctoral researchers from the Graduate School of Education. They hosted a panel session and fed all of us in attendance. All of this hospitality was possible by our connection with Dr.



Faculty Director
Miroslava Chávez-García, Ph.D.

Anne Charity Hudley, Associate Dean at the Stanford School of Education and our former co-PI. Thank you Anne! Next, we traveled to UC Berkeley where the Graduate Division's Diversity Office met with us and provided an overview of the opportunities on the campus and also offered a filling meal. While our time was short at Berkeley, the students had the chance to interact with and meet informally UCLA McNair scholars. In between the two visits, we also made an excursion to the San Francisco Wharf, to the famous Pier 39. There, we ate a touristy meal at a touristy eatery. When in Rome! Overall, it was a lot of fun and we built memories that will stay with us for a long time.

Farewell to the Program Director



Program Director
Veronica L. Fematt, Ph.D.

Bitter-sweet. That's what I call the moment in the spring when we had to say "goodbye" to our Program Director, Dr. Veronica Fematt, who resigned from McNair to head the inaugural HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution) Office on campus. As the new director, Dr. Fematt brings vision to the El Centro-student-led initiative—created through struggle—to bring a student-centered approach to the HSI agenda. After nearly ten years of first being deemed an HSI, the wait was finally over in 2024 with the establishment of that office and Dr. Fematt's hire. On her agenda is determining how UCSB is "serving" our community, developing relevant HSI initiatives, and implementing structures to enga-

ge Latiné students, staff, and faculty at UCSB.

A graduate from the Gevirtz School of Education at UCSB, Dr. Fematt brings her professional expertise and personal experience in working with transfer students and the transfer student pipeline, many of whom are Latiné students, to the office. With her personality and sincere interest in student's holistic well-being, we know that she will make a great addition to the campus. We remain in gratitude and wish you the best!

Stay tuned for our next newsletter where we will introduce our new Program Director, Dr. Yasmine Hachimi.

New Scholars



Andre Braga
Major: Statistics and Data Science
Faculty Mentor: Yan Xifeng



Breeanna Pernas
Major: Psychology and Brain Sciences
Faculty Mentor: Nolan Krueger



Citlali Ibarra
Major: Psychology and Brain Sciences
Faculty Mentor: Karen Szumlinsky



Natalia Rodriguez Martinez
Major: Psychology and Brain Sciences
Faculty Mentor: Miya Barnett

Class of 2024 Graduate Programs

Eleven Graduating Seniors Make their Mark



Fatima Aguilar
UCLA Lab Technician
Applying to PhD programs



Jada Alexander
Founder
Daybreak Beachclub



Naka Eleleh
Northeastern
PhD in Criminology & Justice
Policy



Andrea Gomez
Applying to PhD programs in
2025



Genesis Hernandez
SDSU
Master's in Social Work



Evelyn Isais
Harvard University
Master's in Theological Studies



Jacqueline Lopez
University Nevada, Reno
PhD in Clinical Psychology



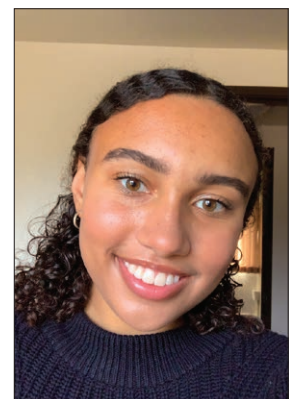
Monsi Lupian
SDSU
PostBaccalaureate Program



Alex Reed
Applying to PhD programs in
2024



Lucero Torres Ojeda
Applying to PhD programs in
2024



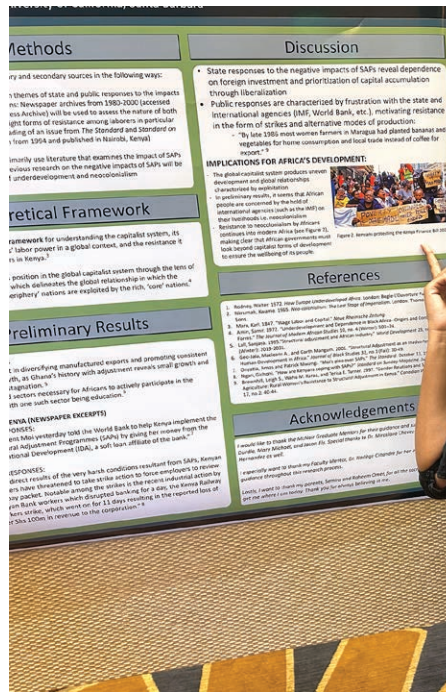
Marian Walker
Applying to PhD programs in
2024



McNair Summer Research Campus Touring

Early into the summer program, we joined UCLA's McNair Scholars Program and toured Stanford University and UC Berkeley. Our first excursion in the last five years, we made our way to Stanford, where we had a brief tour of the campus and visited Green Library. There, we learned about the library's technological innovations making research interactive and a hands-on experience. We also met with faculty, staff, and postdoctoral researchers in the School of Education where they discussed the kind of impact they hope to make with their research, specifically in low-income and marginalized communities of color.

After our stop at Stanford, we traveled to the San Francisco Wharf, to Pier 39 to be exact. Little did we know that the Giants were about to start a game when we rolled through the street next to the stadium. After the routine grid-lock that we're used to, we made it to our destination and enjoyed a quick meal and tour. The next day, we ventured to UC Berkeley. There, we met with folks in the Graduate Division and visited their off campus community learning center. While we didn't have a chance to tour the campus, we had fun in the few hours remaining of our multi-site tour.



McNairing at UCLA's McNair National Conference

In late July, the UCSB McNair Scholars attended the Annual UCLA McNair National Conference in Westwood, California. With up to 400 participants from across the country, the event consisted of keynote speakers whose specialty focuses on empowering first-generation/low-income and underrepresented students as well as professionals representing their universities. Most importantly, the conference gave our students the opportunity to share their research in poster and oral presentations. Zeena Omer, featured here (bottom right), shared her findings on “Neocolonialism and Forms of Resistance in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Impact of Structural Adjustment.” Some of our students also took advantage of the

opportunity by meeting with potential UCLA PhD advisors during the event. Others had a chance to network with undergraduates from a variety of institutions. Overall, our scholars did an outstanding job, despite some of their nerves. In addition to conferencing, we also did some McNairing by going out and sharing meals and building community.

Photographed: Graduate mentors Jason Fly and Mary Michael; Scholars Mayra Canseco, Chiara Cimarusti, Rocio Curiel, Maria Donan, Andrea Gomez, Karen Gonzalez-Salazar, Jasmine Labastida, Laila LoRe, Zeena Omer, and Eliza Pasha.

External Summer Research Program Highlights



Melissa Romero

Melissa Romero (front row, center) participated in the ten-week Summer Educational Research Program (SERP) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. SERP offers undergraduate students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, the chance to engage in independent research within the School of Education. The program aims to give these students the skills, opportunities, and encouragement needed to pursue

and excel in graduate studies. SERP's primary goal is to increase access to high-quality research opportunities for diverse students, fostering their ability to thrive in academia. SERP also seeks to promote research that addresses critical educational issues, particularly on equity and impact.

When asked what she learned during the program, Melissa said, "Under the guidance of my mentor, Dr. Chris Saldaña, I gained a deeper understanding of Wisconsin's educational policy landscape.

My research focused on analyzing educational funding programs and policies, learning how to interpret complex data, and translating those insights into narratives highlighting the impact on marginalized communities." Melissa noted that a highlight of the program "was connecting with students from various universities, all passionate about educational research and building a network of like-minded peers, sharing our diverse perspectives, and discussing our academic goals." When asked how the McNair Scholars Program helped her prepare, she said: "The McNair Scholars Program gave me a strong foundation in research skills. It taught me how to effectively write research papers, critically engage with academic articles, and build professional networks—skills necessary during my time at SERP." Melissa's final words of advice for younger scholars applying to summer research programs: "Apply to as many summer programs as you can! Be open to exploring different locations and institutions—you'll gain invaluable experiences and learn from new cultures and academic environments. Each program will offer something unique that will shape your academic journey."

Isabel 'Isa' Ruacho

Isa Ruacho (holding letter "A") participated in the 9-week-long Leadership Alliance Summer Research Early Identification Program (SR-EIP) at the University of Chicago. The Leadership Alliance includes 22 institutions focused on personal training in academic research, professional development and general preparation for an advanced academic career. Isa took part in the Dynamic Experiences in Neuroscience to Diversify Research Internship Training Exposures for Students (DENDRITES) program, a specific group that aims to support the research and career development of students interested in basic, clinical, and translational neuroscience.

When asked about what she accomplished at the program, Isa noted: "I participated in full time (40 hours/week) of research in Dr. Wilma Bainbridge's Brain Bridge Lab. Her lab studies memorability and my project focused on the real-world impacts of memorability by studying it in company logos. Outside the lab, I attended weekly seminars focused on graduate school and professional development, small group meetings with the other DENDRITES students to prepare for the LANS conference, and biweekly DENDRITES lunches with the UChicago Medicine's Chair of Neurolo-



gy (Dr. Shyam Prabhakaran) to discuss neuroscience research and graduate school. Near the end of the program, I presented my research at the Leadership Alliance National Symposium in Hartford, Connecticut and the UChicago DENDRITES Symposium.

The highlight: "The opportunity to present at the Leadership Alliance National Symposium in Connecticut. This was my first experience traveling to an external, national conference and I really enjoyed

hearing other neuroscience presentations and meeting Leadership Alliance students from the other universities. Another highlight of the program was getting to know all the other students in my cohort. The summer program encouraged us to get to know one another and funded several Chicago excursions for the cohort. It was really interesting to hear about everyone's unique research interests and experiences, discuss our goals of grad school, and just become friends with some great people!"

Graduate Mentors



A Sad Farewell to Writing Specialist Courtney Durdle

This year, we say congratulations and farewell to our previous writing specialist Dr. Courtney Durdle. Courtney, who is now an Associate Research Scholar at the Justice Collaboratory at Yale Law School, was a wealth of knowledge, inspiration, and motivation to everyone in the McNair Scholars Program. In addition to providing high quality writing and research advising to our undergraduate scholars, she brought an avalanche of positive energy to everyone around her. When students felt stressed or scared from their growing coursework and research, Courtney assured them of their skills while cracking a few jokes about her own experiences. When staff felt overwhelmed and exhausted with program administration, Courtney brought the bright and bountiful energy that we needed to continue serving our students. Courtney was and continues to be a shining example of what it means to go above and

beyond in both your research and your service, and she serves as an excellent model to all of us here at McNair. We'll miss her reminiscent rants about her days at UC Davis as an undergraduate, her strong reactions to "spicy" food, and her devotion to her dogs Cali and Uni. Her absence is deeply felt here in the McNair office, but we're all so thrilled to see what great things she's going to accomplish in her future. We can't wait to see you come back to California as a tenure-track faculty member who's eager to mentor more aspiring researchers. Until then, we'll make sure to keep your favorite piece of advice in mind as we guide our scholars into their own futures: "follow your heart!" - Mary Michael

"Courtney is one of the most inspiring individuals I've ever met both in her intelligence and her positive outlook on life! Her advice and belief in my success is a contributing factor to my

continuing motivation toward pursuing academic achievements! Courtney always says that you don't need to please everyone, only the right people, and I believe that Courtney is one of the right people to please :) - Citlali Ibarra, Class of 2026

"Courtney's joy was contagious. The moment she stepped into a room, everything felt lighter. Her warmth, support, and positive spirit always uplifted me and made the world feel like a brighter place. I hope to be at least half the person Courtney is when I'm in graduate school, she is such an inspiration." - Andrea Gomez, Class of 2025

"Courtney has been such a key part of the McNair Program for me—both for the optimistic energy she consistently brought to our seminars and her amazing advice as a writing specialist. Courtney helped me revise countless appli-

cations for my summer research programs, URCA, and other scholarships last year and I am so grateful for all her support through it all. She will definitely be missed but I'm so excited for her coming years at Yale!" - Isa Ruacho, Class of 2025

"Dr. Durdle's vivacious spirit, infectious laugh, and wise mentorship has been known to all of us who have had the pleasure of working with her. Her insight into the graduate school process and human experience is absolutely invaluable and has guided so many of us to better essays, presentations, and decisions. While I will miss her love of Disney, Olive Garden, Cali, Uni, the human brain, and -of course- us (we all felt it), I am elated knowing that some folks in New England get to experience her. After all, everyone needs someone like Dr. Courtney Durdle in their lives." - Laila LoRe, Class of 2025

McNair

Publications and Awards

Mayra Cancesco (senior) made the Dean's Honor List in F2023, W2024, S2024. She also won a Winthrop Undergraduate Research Grant, \$2500.

Chiara Cimarusti (senior) was a Purdue Gradtrack scholar and was invited to participate in the UC Davis Envision Program as well as the Graduate & Professional Student Recruitment Initiative (GPS) at Ohio State University.

Citlali Ibarra (junior) received an award from the Hispanic Scholarship Fund in 2024 and is currently a fellow.

Laila LoRe (senior) made the Dean's Honor Roll from Spring 2023-Fall 2024. She was also a Panelist at the "UC Santa Barbara Inclusive Teaching Symposium" and received three scholarships. They include the Crankstart Transfer Scholarship (2025), UCSB Promise Scholars Program Scholarship (2023-2025), and the UCSB Ridley Tree Scholarship (2024).

Isa Ruacho (senior) was awarded multiple grants, some to help support her time away studying in the Netherlands. They include: George Chen Memorial Scholarship \$2000, EAP Gaucho Scholarship \$2300, and the EAP Global Scholarship \$2000.

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