Scholar Spotlight

By Crystal Jackson, Doctoral Candidate Sociology and McNair Graduate Mentor

It’s a rainy Thursday afternoon on the East coast. Edgar Cruz answers the telephone in the midst of catching a breath. He has just returned from the gym he is using while completing a summer research fellowship at Princeton University. His voice sounds confident yet easy-going as he describes his experience at Princeton and his experience as a McNair Scholar.

Since arriving to Princeton, Cruz’ days have been busy to say the least. Not only has he taken two graduate-level courses in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public Policy, he has also been part of a research team that is investigating the potential impact that proposed state legislation may have on people who lack healthcare insurance in Camden, one of New Jersey’s most impoverished cities. According to Cruz the proposed legislation, called the New Jersey Innovation Act, intends to use the philanthropic arm of private-sector corporations to aid in implementing programs, which are meant to address social problems in low-income and underserved cities like Camden. The proposed legislation is based on the idea that corporate resources can be used as a kind of failsafe to protect against the fiscal limitations of the state. When the state is unable to adequately fund innovative ideas that could potentially address social problems that communities face, corporate organizations can provide financial resources that allows those ideas to come to fruition.

As a fellow at Princeton, Cruz is a member of a research team that is working with the State of New Jersey, as well as two corporate philanthropies and a number of non-profit organizations to understand the costs and benefits associated with the proposed legislation. According to Cruz, the research team is currently conducting a number of analyses, including one study that compares the costs the state currently assumes for emergency room visits to the projected costs associated with programs that will be implemented under the proposed legislation.

The fellowship has also provided Cruz with a unique opportunity to complete his McNair research project using data the research team is collecting. His research paper takes into consideration the potential economic, social and political impact the proposed legislation may have on underserved communities in New Jersey.

Commenting on his experience on the research team, Cruz reflected, “It’s something I’ve never done before. It’s a bit of a challenge but it’s something that I want to go into in the future.” Cruz’ intention to contribute to public policy as a researcher has been informed by a number of factors. One big reason: actively contributing to public policy as a researcher provides the chance to give voice to underserved and marginalized groups – those groups, who in Cruz’ opinion, too often have others speaking on their behalf.

As a first-generation college student and a Latino, the idea of giving voice to those whose experiences may be neglected by policymakers...
Welcome from the Dean

I would like to extend a warm welcome to our very first Loyola McNair Scholars cohort. The McNair experience at Loyola promises to be eventful, enriching, and inspiring. Our key goal is to ensure the success of our scholars through a rich array of academic, social, and financial supports. We hope to create an engaging and vibrant intellectual community by combining an institutional commitment to learning in the service of others with a belief that complex social issues can be effectively addressed from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Critical to the development of our first community of McNair scholars is the extensive involvement of Faculty Research Mentors who will lead research seminars, collaborate with McNair students on the development of their research projects, assist them in a Summer Research Residency to undertake their research, and help Scholars become actively involved in presenting research findings at conference and scholarly venues.

In order to undertake high quality research projects, I encourage our Scholars to acquire such basic research skills as developing a literature review, identifying a research problem, and preparing research reports. Also, become acquainted with the ethical and responsible conduct of research, particularly issues related to scientific misconduct, human subjects, animal welfare, authorships, and conflicts of interest. There are further opportunities to acquire additional transferable skills through internships, service learning, shadowing researchers, interviewing alumni and professionals, and networking with graduate students and faculty from graduate schools across the nation.

Take full advantage of your visits to graduate schools in the region and beyond, and do not hesitate to ask all the questions about life in academia. Finally, as Loyola students, take to heart our mission of expanding knowledge in the service of humanity through learning, justice, and faith. Utilize your intellectual talents to serve the poor and underprivileged, reach out to underserved communities, and contribute to the common good. I wish you much success throughout your journey towards a doctoral degree.

Samuel A. Attoh, PhD
Associate Provost for Research and Graduate School Dean
Loyola University Chicago

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means a lot to Cruz. He first realized the importance of achieving this goal during his senior year in high school in his hometown of Dallas, Texas. Prior to graduating, Cruz contemplated moving to California to become an actor. After thoughtful consideration, however, he determined that college was a better path for him. His decision to pursue sociology as an undergraduate course of study was informed in part by what he understood as stereotypical media depictions of Latino men, which failed to reveal to the diversity of their experiences. “The roles I would have been offered would likely have been a police officer or gang member—or something of that nature. I really believe in equality and accessibility,” remarked Cruz. “With policy, you’re creating the norm. You’re creating the culture and that gets institutionalized. And I feel that a lot of folks that should be institutionalizing specific norms aren’t”, he reasoned.

Cruz intends to earn his PhD in sociology with an emphasis on public policy. According to Cruz, being a McNair Scholar has made achieving his goal a little bit easier. “I’ve never had so much exposure and a direct push toward grad school – specifically toward getting a Ph.D. I’m a first-generation college student. A lot of that conversation did not happen in my family. It’s just really good to know that is someone who speaks that [academic] vocabulary and can answer the questions I have.” “This is like a brand new vernacular I have”, Cruz continued, “because of McNair I can talk to you about what grad school is and what it means.” If McNair has aided Cruz in demystifying what it means to attend graduate school with the intention of attaining a PhD, that knowledge is not something he’s keeping to himself. In fact, he takes every opportunity to share his experience with other students on campus. “Sharing [information] with other folks, or even just to talk to someone about what grad school is – they would really appreciate that”, said Cruz. “[McNair] can be used as a tool or an instrument. So I share that knowledge with other folks.”

Cruz will return to Chicago in August. In addition to applying to graduate programs at universities like Oxford, Harvard and Princeton, he also plans to present his research at two professional conferences in the fall.

“Because of McNair I can talk to you about what grad school is and what it means.”
Named in honor of Physicist, Dr. Ronald Erwin McNair, who perished in the 1986 Space Shuttle Challenger accident, the McNair Scholars Program is rigorous and requires that students take their educational commitment seriously. The program’s mission is to prepare eligible undergraduate students, interested in earning a PhD, for graduate study. This is accomplished through scholarly activities that include mentoring by faculty, seminars and workshops, opportunities to conduct research, financial support to attend professional conferences to present their research findings, visits to graduate schools, and more.

McNair Scholars work closely with a faculty mentor and the McNair staff to successfully complete the program. We are recruiting juniors for our 2013-2014 year program.

Interested students and faculty are invited to visit our website at LUC.edu/mcnair for more information.

Eileen Rollerson, Ph.D.
Director, McNair Scholars Program

Message from the Director

It is an honor to have the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program (also known as the McNair Scholars Program) at Loyola University Chicago.

As we approach the end of our first year, we are excited to announce that we have received a second year of funding from the Department of Education to continue preparing students for higher learning. If you are not familiar with the McNair Scholars Program, here is a bit of introduction and background information you will find helpful.

The McNair Scholars Program is one of eight federally funded TRIO programs created to provide educational and financial support for underrepresented, low-income and first generation students.

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Eileen Rollerson, Ph.D.
Director, McNair Scholars Program
Meet Our Scholars

Lauren Adams  
Women Studies & Gender Studies; Educational Policy  
Junior

Florence Adole  
Biochemistry; Psychology  
Senior

Juan Barriga  
Psychology; Women Studies and Gender Studies  
Junior

Yvonne Cardenas  
Criminal Justice and Criminology  
Senior

Edgar Cruz  
Sociology  
Senior

Sotonye Hart  
Psychology; Human Services  
Senior

Antoinette Isama  
Journalism  
Senior

Monica Kulach  
Psychology  
Senior

Madeline L’Esperance  
Finance & Economics  
Senior

Jorge Luis Meres  
Environmental Science  
Senior

Melissa Orozco  
Psychology  
B.S. 2013

Cassandra Osei  
Political Science; International Studies  
Junior

The Loyola University Chicago McNair Program provides academic support, research opportunities, and involvement in scholarly activities to qualifying students who have the desire and potential to earn an advanced degree. Program participants are either first generation college students and need eligible, or are members of a group underrepresented in graduate education. Loyola’s McNair Scholars Program selects fifteen students each year and works closely with them to ensure their successful completion of the baccalaureate degree and application and admission to graduate school. Find further info at our website: LUC.edu/mcnair
Meet Our Scholars

Miguel Ramirez
Psychology; Neuroscience
Junior

Pedro Regalado
History
Senior

Christian Restrepo
Psychology
Senior

Carlos Robles
Secondary Education; Spanish Literature
Senior

Karina Sanchez
Psychology; Latin American Studies
Junior

Grace Trujillo
Social Work
Senior

Kevin Trujillo
Biochemistry
Senior

Jefferson Uriarte
Psychology; International Studies
Senior

Sebastian Villa
History
Senior

Giselle Villatoro
Sociology
Senior

Bianca Wells
Biology
Senior

Scholars not shown:

Hilton Adolinama • B.A. 2013 • International Studies; French
Vivian Frutos • Senior • Criminal Justice & Criminology
Rafael Gutierrez • Senior • Biology
Linette Mejia • Senior • Political Science

Janet Ocampo • BSW 2013 • Social Work
Timothy Rose • Senior • Political Science
Sandra Slowik • Junior • Chemistry
Cindy Tran • Junior • Psychology; Biology
Scholarly Contributions

Conducting this research this summer has been pretty similar to peeling off the layers of an onion. Every macro idea thus far reveals many micros that cannot be explored in nine weeks.

Why spend time behind the computer exploring the “virtual world” that is New African Social Media? The advent of African youth having the space to show creativity and to share it through virtual communities hits home. Producers are able to communicate and share what they believe Africa was like in the past, what Africa is like in the present, and what Africa will be in the future. New African Social Media is an example of how new forms of media impact culture. Those within this “virtual world” are able to re-appropriate content and attach new meaning to the content they create or share.

With this, it is interesting to unpack how this content differs from Africa-content material in mainstream media. New African Social Media allows producers and consumers to shed a different light on what Africa means and is to them: diverse, progressive, and positive. People are given the freedom to be bold to create, report, and share what they do not see in mainstream media; as well as to give a more balanced view of what occurs on and off the continent.

So far in my research I have found that people most popularly share visually contextual content that depicts people, daily life, and women. The peeling of this onion continues as I unpack the why, how, where, and when of these findings.

Antoinette Isama
Senior, Journalism

Meet My Mentor: Dr. Tracy DeHart

By Melissa Orozco, B.S. Psychology, McNair Scholar

Dr. DeHart is a faculty member in the Psychology Department. At the undergraduate level she teaches social psychology and research methods. At the graduate level she teaches statistics, a seminar on the self and self-esteem, and graduate social psychological theory. Dr. DeHart received her bachelor’s degree from University of Wisconsin Madison, and received her graduate degree from State University of New York at Buffalo. She has also completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Connecticut Medical School. Dr. DeHart’s research interests are in the areas of the self, self-esteem, and close relationships.

Why did you decide to pursue a doctorate?
I didn’t know what to do with my bachelor degree, and was interested in teaching and doing research. I applied to graduate school unsure of how the entire process worked. I was not familiar with the graduate school application process or what experiences were necessary. I did not get accepted the first time I applied, but I got some additional research experience and luckily was accepted into a graduate program the second time I applied. I knew I wanted an advanced degree and really wanted to teach and conduct research.

What were the biggest obstacles to obtaining your PhD?
The biggest obstacles were definitely financial obstacles. A lot of my friends were working and I had to make a lot of financial sacrifices along the way. In graduate school you receive a stipend but it is not lucrative, and it gets hard when your friends are making four or five times what you make. Financial sacrifices were the biggest obstacles I encountered.

What were the best experiences in obtaining your PhD?
I was lucky enough to have worked with great mentors and good fellow students, which was very helpful. I really enjoyed what I was doing. Graduate school is a lot of work and you need to make a lot of sacrifices, so if you are working doing something you love it makes it a lot easier.

Why did you choose to get involved with McNair?
I got involved with McNair because I was a first generation college student. In fact, I would have qualified for the program when I was back in school (if the program existed then). I think it is very good for people from underrepresented backgrounds to get additional help and guidance. This program would have helped me tremendously when I was going through the graduate application process. I really didn’t know what I was doing and luckily everything eventually worked out. I think it’s a great program and something I would have greatly benefited from when I was completing my undergraduate degree.

What led you to joining the faculty of the Psychology department?
I like Loyola’s commitment to social justice and that they embrace both research and teaching. These are things that I hold important so Loyola was a great fit. Loyola is also located in a great city so that was a plus!

What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?
Working with students is by far the most rewarding aspect of my job. I enjoy teaching in the classroom, but my favorite

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Congratulations Graduates of 2013!

The McNair staff would like to recognize three of our scholars who graduated with Bachelor’s degrees from Loyola University Chicago this year:

**Hilton Adolinama**  
French/International Studies – BA

**Janet Ocampo**  
Social Work – BSW

**Melissa Orozco**  
Psychology – BS

We wish you many more successes in the future!

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Meet My Mentor, continued from page 6  
aspect is working on research with students in my lab.

**Any words of advice for Scholars?**  
The best advice I can give is that if you have a goal in mind, even if you don’t succeed right away keep trying. Perseverance pays off. If you apply to a graduate program and don’t get in the first time, keep trying. I would not be where I am today if I gave up the first time I applied to graduate school and didn’t get accepted. Hard work and perseverance does pay off.

* Dr. DeHart serves as mentor for 3 McNair Scholars.

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Flashbacks: Graduate School Visits & More

The first year of LUC’s McNair Scholars Program has been a busy one! These are just a few of the trips and events in which our scholars have participated. For more photos, please visit our website at LUC.edu/mcnair.

Dr. Samuel Atrosh, Associate Provost for Research (far right) and the McNair Scholars with their faculty mentors at the 2013 McNair Summer Luncheon.

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Scholars at UW-Madison

Scholars at MLK’s historic home in Atlanta, GA

Scholars and Staff at UC Berkeley
About Dr. Ronald E. McNair

Ronald McNair was born in 1950 in a small town of Lake City, South Carolina, in a family of an auto repairman and an elementary school teacher.

He graduated with honors from Carver High School in his hometown and enrolled into North Carolina A&T University, from which he graduated magna cum laude with a B.S. in Physics. In 1976, he accomplished a Ph.D. in Physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), during which he studied laser physics with many authorities in the field, and performed some breakthrough developments in that area. In 1978, he was selected by NASA as an astronaut candidate, completed a 1-year training program and qualified for an assignment as a mission specialist astronaut on Space Shuttle flight crews. He logged a total of 191 hours in space before the 1986 explosion of Space Shuttle Challenger that took his life and the lives of five other astronauts.

Becoming an astronaut in the United States space program is a major accomplishment for anyone, let alone an African-American born in mid-20th century in a small poor rural town, but setting high standards and overcoming obstacles was part of life's journey for Ronald McNair.

Dr. McNair recognized the importance of a good education and the impact it could have on an individual's life. He encouraged young people to prepare for the future and get their education. He spent many hours encouraging individuals from minority and low-income backgrounds to set the highest standards for themselves.

"Whether or not you reach your goals in life depends entirely on how well you prepare for them and how badly you want them. You’re eagles! Stretch your wings and fly to the sky!"

Ronald Ervin McNair, Ph.D.
October 21, 1950 – January 28, 1986

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Let Us Take You From Point A to PhD.

MCNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM

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