Many readers of this newsletter know that my scholarship centers on a decolonial approach to mentoring. My work relies on relational pedagogy theorists, and although my writing focuses on faculty mentors and their undergraduate students, I value and encourage many types of mentoring relationships. To sustain young scholars in the difficult work of transforming the academy, strong networks of emotional and academic support are vital. One of the joys of having been part of the Westminster College McNair Scholars Program from its inception in 2003 is that I know every student we have served over the past 13 years, and I’ve witnessed the special relationships that can evolve within and across cohorts. In this piece, we would like to shine a small spotlight on two such relationships, each of which exemplifies a particular type of mentorship: the mentoring relationship between an advanced graduate student (now a recent PhD) and an undergraduate McNair Scholar who is currently in the third year of her doctoral program, and the support and friendship of peer mentorship.

~ Jo Hinsdale, Ph.D.

McNair Mentoring Relationships

Katrina England graduated from Westminster College in 2014 with a major in philosophy. In fall 2014, she entered the doctoral program in philosophy at SUNY Binghamton. She’s completed the requirements for the master’s degree, and was also selected as a Women and Public Policy fellow through the SUNY Albany Center for Women in Government and Civil Society. Through this fellowship, she helped craft LGBTQ-friendly polices for the State of New York in spring 2016.

Successful McNair Scholars, it seems to me, embrace multiple mentors who serve different purposes, and understand that both mentors and protégés can learn and grow through their relationship. I reached out to Asia by email in my junior year after reading about her success in a McNair newsletter like this one. I was fortunate to have excellent faculty mentors at Westminster, but I sought advice from someone who could speak directly to specific concerns: national and department-specific opportunities for McNair alumnae at the graduate level, the well-being of women in philosophy, and how philosophers (as opposed to sociologists, anthropologists, literary scholars, etc.) approach feminist critique. Over five years now, Asia has answered my questions, and more. She has sent opportunities my way, introduced me to faculty and graduate students both in and outside of her department, and supported three of my applications to summer institutes.

Cont. p.2
I am supremely grateful for Asia’s ongoing wisdom and encouragement. My advice for current McNair scholars: remember that academic mentorship takes forms beyond professor-student relationships, and that you can initiate contact with potential mentors across McNair cohorts.

Asia Ferrin was a 2007 graduate of Westminster College. Like Katrina, she was a philosophy major who entered a doctoral program the fall after her graduation. Asia received the Ronald E. McNair Graduate and Dissertation Fellowships from the University of Washington, and completed her PhD at UW in May 2016. From 2014-2016 she served as the Faye Sawyier Predoctoral Teaching Fellow at Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. Currently, she is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Kansas State University.

It has been a really special treat to connect with Katrina over the years. Not only has it been great to get to hear about the interesting work she is doing—on LGTBQ rights and feminist conceptions of the self, for example—but also to get to know her as a kind, bright, and thoughtful person. We philosophers are very lucky to have her in the discipline. I’ve enjoyed mentoring Katrina as a McNair Scholar particularly because it has given me an opportunity to pass along some of the hard-earned wisdom I learned in grad school. When you are close to finishing or recently finished, it’s very easy to look back and see mistakes you’ve made, things you wish you would have known or done differently. Mentoring can in a way feel like an opportunity to go back in time and fix some of that, hopefully making the road a little bit easier for someone else. We know that one of the major disadvantages first-generation students face is lack of inherited knowledge about the academy. With parents who did not go to college or even graduate high school, we are not only faced with challenging academic work, but also figuring out how to navigate a largely foreign institution. I see mentoring as an opportunity to pass along some of the insights about graduate school and the profession more generally that took me a good bit of time and energy to learn. And along the way, I get the wonderful benefit of connecting with more junior scholars like Katrina who are doing new, innovative work. It is an absolute delight to see her actively engaged and contributing so much to the field. Her success and the important work she does make me excited about the future of the discipline.

Mentoring cont’d. on p. 3

McNair Accomplishments

Peter Dien (U of Utah Dec. 2010) is in the second year of his Rotary Peace Fellowship. He will soon earn a master’s in Peace and Conflict Studies from the Uppsala University in Sweden.

Lisa Molina (U of Utah 2016) was awarded the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship from the University of Utah Center for Latin American Studies.

Katie McLean (Westminster 2016) and Melissa Puga (U of Utah 2016) were both awarded Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP) Fellowships from the National Science Foundation (NSF); Katie was also awarded the Rackham Merit Fellowship the University of Michigan.

Chrono Nu (Westminster 2015) received an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship to continue his doctoral work in the Biomedical Engineering department at the University of Michigan.

Robin Renée Smith (Westminster 2013) has published an article in collaboration with her McNair mentor, Dr. Marilee Coles-Ritchie. “Taking the Risk to Engage in Race Talk: Professional Development in Elementary Schools” appeared in the June 2016 issue of International Journal of Inclusive Education; it is based on Robin’s summer 2102 research in the McNair Scholars program.

Stephen Tahan (Westminster 2016) received an Honorable Mention in the GRFP competition.

Ethel Tackie-Yarboi (Westminster College, Dec.2013) has received four years’ of funding through the Northern Ohio AGEP Alliance to continue her PhD in medicinal chemistry at the University of Toledo.
Vanessa Seals (left) and Nichole Garcia (below) both began graduate school in the fall of 2010. Vanessa is now ABD in English at Stanford University; she expects to defend her dissertation sometime this academic year. Nichole earned her PhD from UCLA in July 2016 and is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Here, they write about their friendship, highlighting the ways they have also been peer mentors to one another as they navigate the academy.

Our first meeting in McNair research class was memorable—Nichole accosted (for lack of a better word) Vanessa, and said, “We’re gonna be friends.” Vanessa was wary, but we bonded in class and over the summer, and by the beginning of the school year, we were really good friends. The daunting graduate application process strengthened our friendship—and better yet—taught us both what a colleague should be. We shared application documents, set deadlines together, talked about our offers, and kept telling one another how awesome we both are (which we still do till this day).

As women of color we entered graduate school with rose-colored glasses on our fabulous faces, but behind those glasses were tears, doubts, fears—imposter syndrome is real. Our friendship became essential from the first day we walked into our respective institutions. We have supported each other through struggles with coursework, research, teaching, presenting, relationships with advisors, personal problems, and feeling like we wanted to drop out (which has happened more than once, for both of us). Our friendship has only grown since we have been in graduate school, and we are now entering the academic world as Dr. Garcia and Dr. Seals. It would be difficult to point out everything that makes our friendship great, but here are a few things, as they apply to academia:

- Having a friend going through graduate school at the same time as you, but in a different institution, can be a life-saver! The frustrating things about academia are the same (or similar) no matter where you go. That is hard to know when you first encounter it, or when you have been stuck in your head trying to perfect that paper or that experiment or that chapter. It’s a good reminder that a lot of the dysfunction and issues have very little to do with you.

- As underrepresented students, graduate school is very difficult, and you will feel lost a majority of the time. However, there will be a day when everything falls into place and you will be able to talk the talk and walk the walk. We attribute our awesome strolls to the support we provide one another.

- It’s useful to have a friend in a different field. Knowledge of different disciplines gives you an appreciation for how things are done elsewhere, and adds depth and texture to your life and research.

- Visit your friends’ cities or middle of nowhere towns. We stay refreshed as we plan and visit each other throughout the year because seeing someone from home helps!

- Finally, you’re going to want to quit. At least once, but probably more like a dozen times. The desire will vary in severity from, “I think I might want to leave grad school sometime soon perhaps,” to, “I’ve looked up jobs. I’ve sent out applications. I’ll be out by the end of the month.” In fact, Nichole made a difficult decision when she realized her first graduate program at UC Santa Barbara was not for her by terminating herself out and reaplying to PhD programs. She entered UCLA and realized that the feeling of wanting to quit never truly goes away. Vanessa at Stanford confirmed such insights. Both of us have felt like quitting so many times, it’s hard to keep count. The trick is, you can’t both want to quit at the same time. And also, when you hear your friend disparaging herself, it is easier to point out all of her great qualities and how academia will be better with her in it. When you can’t pick yourself up, that’s when you turn to your friends.

- We both attribute our success in large part to our relationship and our unwavering support and cheerleading of one another.

Keep in touch with your fellow McNerds! Stay awesome, and make sure you remind your fellow McNerds how awesome they are! Every city we have lived in we have McNerd friends. You never know if they might be one of the top reasons you reach your goals.
Abby Steven Arellanes
Steven will earn a PhD in Sociology at North Carolina State University. He has deferred his offer of graduate admission until 2017-2018.

Brianda De Leon
Brianda began the M.Ed. program in Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Utah.

Elizabeth Gamarra
Elizabeth began the MSW program in Social Work at the University of Utah.

Karissa Killian
Karissa will begin working for Texas Conservation Crew in November.

Quan Le
Quan began the master’s program in Civil Engineering at the University of Utah.

Kevin Martinez
Kevin began the M.Ed. program in Education, Culture, and Society at the University of Utah.

Katie McLean
Katie began the doctoral program in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Michigan.

Lisa Molina
Lisa began the M.Ed. program in Education, Culture, and Society at the University of Utah.

Melissa Puga
Melissa will earn a PhD in the department of Materials Science & Engineering at Northwestern University. She has deferred her offer of graduate admission.

Guillia Soto
Guillia began the MS program in International Educational Development at the University of Pennsylvania.

Stephen Tahan
Stephen began the doctoral program in Immunology at Washington University in St. Louis.

Tashelle Wright
Tashelle began the doctoral program Public Health at the University of California, Merced.
Words of Wisdom from the Summer 2016 Research Cohort

What advice would you give to McNair Scholars on selecting a research topic?

Alaa Al-Barkawi
Pick your favorite topic or research you’ve done for a class and make it your own. You never want to be bored with your own research. Think about something you know and think about what you don’t know about it.

Marin Hauptman
Look for research in unlikely places, and don’t be afraid to ask about opportunities.

David Hernandez
Stalk some professors and find out what research they are doing and read their articles/books. Pick two or three that you like, then choose and ask them if you can work with them on their projects.

Viridiana Martinez
Select something you want to continue to study. When you are passionate about your topic it will make your summer feel worth all of the hours.

Debbie Sameniego
Select a topic that you are passionate about because that will fuel you throughout the summer, even when the research becomes frustrating.

Jacie Wach
I would advise students not to feel too rushed into deciding on a topic, with the caveat that they must also stay diligent and use their time to research and find gaps in current research.

What advice would you give to McNair Scholars on making the most of the Summer Research Intensive?

Carly Blasco
Take full advantage of the McNair summer research program. It is an opportunity to interact on a personal level with your mentor and other students in the cohort.

Taylor Kelso
Select a research topic that truly makes you wonder. Ask a question that instills an unstoppable amount of energy and motivation in you.

Catherine Konold
Take all the workshops and assignments as seriously as possible even if you aren’t applying to graduate school until next year.

Stephanie Miller
It is crucial to find a mentor you work well with. Not only are they there to help you with your research, but find one who is willing to provide emotional support as well. That is what got me through my summer.

Yajaira Peralta
It's summer and it's way easy to get distracted with friends/significant others but staying focused on your research is also important especially because it's for a short amount of time.

Ashma Shrestha
Keep persisting! It will get hard and hectic, there may even be times when you don't have enough hours to complete all that needs to be completed but do not give in to the thought of quitting. Keep at it because the results will be worth it!

What advice would you give to McNair Scholars who will be part of the group project next year?

Andrea Sáenz Cancino
Be flexible with the project topic and really take advantage of this experience to learn about the process of research. I am not a neuroscience major, but our group project this past summer really taught me a lot.

Amarina Chavez
Start brainstorming early for research topics and don’t stress about work load because you will have a great team.

Jamil McPherson
Understand that even if the project is not exactly what you want to be doing for the rest of your life in research, you should still put the entirety of your effort into it because it is more about the experience of researching not the topic.
The Professors Are In

Twelve Westminster McNair Scholars from earlier cohorts have earned PhDs. The ultimate mission of the McNair program is to diversify the professoriate, so we thought it might be time to ask two questions of alumni who have been university faculty for a few years:

What has been the biggest challenge of being a professor?

What do you most enjoy about being a professor?

**Dr. Angie Andrade** teaches psychology at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Perhaps my greatest challenge as a new faculty member has been becoming comfortable with not working too much—to learn to take time for myself. I entered my professorship immediately after graduate study, where it was common to work long, 12-hour days, weekends included. Now, I am trying to transition into faculty mode, breaking that overloaded schedule. The difficulty is that I enjoy making my courses interactive and appealing to the students. I love being able to teach a concept, relate it to research studies, and also show its current relevance in the real world. I try to make each topic interesting to the students and exciting. With this goal for myself it is easy to slip into my old habits, working late into the evening, or over a weekend. It is still a challenge to tell myself that it is okay to stop working and enjoy some balance in my life, too.

My greatest joy has been to see the students truly enjoy learning, and to witness their progress. It puts me in such high spirits to see a student who is excited to learn– who is connecting with the material, and who is there because they enjoy that more than getting a high grade. In all of my courses, (including statistics!) I’ve heard students mention that “this is my favorite class.” I love being a part of their learning and excitement to come to class each day.

Additionally, their excitement fuels their progress. I teach all levels of psychology—freshman-level through senior-level. I’ve seen my students make amazing strides in the short amount of time I’ve been here. Many have never written an academic paper before taking my intro level courses, but by the time they are in their senior year they are conducting their own research study in its entirety, from conception to dissemination. They have become excited about psychology, are confident, and have produced some amazing work. I am so proud to see them as they graduate, after personally witnessing their accomplishments.

**Dr. Raquel (Gabbitas) Cowell** teaches psychology at St. Norbert’s College.

The biggest challenge has been not looking like the typical professor. Students, staff, and faculty often mistake me for a student and then say I should take it as a compliment. Due to looking younger, it can sometimes be difficult to assign tough grades without worrying about changes in my student evaluations. I am often walking the line between being professional and relatable.

My biggest enjoyment has come from helping students from underrepresented groups feel a sense of belonging. By sharing parts of my identity in class, students feel comfortable approaching me and sharing their stories. It has been extremely satisfying to help students in their journey and to provide them a safe place in a world of both class and race privilege.
**Dr. Reece Peck** teaches media culture at CUNY-Staten Island.

The biggest challenge for me has been meeting publishing deadlines and staying focused on my writing while attending to my teaching and faculty service duties and my duties as a dad. For me, writing is all about momentum so I’ve tried to hone time management strategies in order to secure blocks of time to write and get on a roll. It is not easy though.

I love being a teacher, especially in New York City at the College of Staten Island, CUNY. True to its reputation as the “Harvard of the working-class,” most of my students are first-generation college students. As someone who started their academic career in community college, I personally identify with their trajectory and I’d like to think I have a pretty good relationship with them, a lot of jokes get cracked in my classroom but, with that, a lot of hands are raised as well. I have especially enjoyed advising honors students on independent research projects. Their ambition to become successful professionals really inspires and energizes me and it has been so great to see graduates from our program land exciting jobs in entertainment media, politics, advertising and public relations.

**Dr. Sarah Jackson** teaches communication studies at Northeastern University.

The biggest challenge for me has been being asked to do an immense amount of service because of my identity within a system that does not truly reward service. What I mean by this is that, while all universities require service, women faculty often end up doing more because our students and colleagues expect us to perform certain types of emotional and psychological labor that men faculty are not expected to do. Add being a woman of color to this and everyone wants you to speak at this event, or be on that panel, or serve on such and such a committee, or advise that group. The catch is, there is often little reward for any of this. It's exhausting and takes time away from what is rewarded: scholarship. I'm thankful to have had some wonderful women of color mentors in academia who gave me the strategies to assess what things are worth saying "Yes" to and the language to say "No" to other things - but it took me some time to know to ask for these strategies and language. I now have a Post-It on my computer that says: "Saying 'no' is the same as saying 'yes' to the things that really matter."

I know it's cheating but I have two great professional joys: 1) Getting to see students have huge break-throughs, and really come to understand and be passionate about things because of my courses means the world to me. Working closely with students who care about issues of equality and are thinking in innovative ways about transforming society at both micro and macro levels gives me an immense amount of hope. 2) Getting to travel to amazing places for professional meetings and conferences. I had no idea this would be something that happened so often as an academic, but in the past year and a half I have presented at conferences in Sardinia, Italy, London, England, Paris, France, and San Juan, Puerto Rico - and that doesn't include the conferences in the contiguous U.S. states!
A MESSAGE FROM DR. LARA CHATMAN

I have officially completed a year as the Program Coordinator and I have loved every moment of working with such great scholars. Our current scholars as well as alumni have accomplished so much this past year. We recently welcomed the 2016-17 cohort and I am so excited about 2016-17 academic year and summer. As a product of two TRiO programs: Upward Bound Lemoynoe Owen College (Memphis, TN) and Math & Science Western Carolina University (Cullowhee, NC) I have a special passion for working with TRiO students. During my first year, I learned a lot about students holistically and they all had at least two things in common: 1) Academically competent and 2) Feared their academic abilities. The seed of self-doubt or the imposter syndrome is a reality in many scholars lives and they must learn to conquer it. So this year I have been spending a lot of time reading, researching and talking to students about the imposter syndrome so that I can conduct a workshop “Taking the Bull by the Horns: Overcoming the Seed of Self-Doubt.” My hope for the scholars this year is that they learn to trust the process even when the wind blows or the obstacles seem impossible, and to let go of the fear of uncertainty because they have already achieved so much.

~ Lara Chatman, Ph.D.

You can find our Facebook page by searching “Westminster McNair.” “Like” our page to stay updated on current news within our program.

The Westminster College McNair Scholars Program prepares low-income, first-generation and underrepresented college students for doctoral study. This nationwide program was created in memory of Ronald E. McNair, Ph.D., an African American physicist who died in the space shuttle Challenger mission in 1986.

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