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For more information on the MSU McNair Scholars Program, call (507) 389-1188 or visit our website:
<http://trio.mnsu.edu/mcnair.html>

Commemorating 9/11 and Katrina Anniversaries

This fall marks two anniversaries. These are two of the worst national tragedies for America – the 5th anniversary of the September 11 attacks and one year since Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, destroying homes and displacing families. These events changed each of us. Although these disasters were different in many ways, they shared a lot in common. Both exposed the worst and the best sides of humanity.



Thus both should become lessons to all of us. Lessons that should stay with us for the rest of

our lives. Lessons that are taught to the generations that follow. Lessons in selflessness and courage, as well as lessons in empathy, compassion, respect, and caring.

So let us commemorate those who gave their lives. Let us honor those who rushed to help putting themselves in extreme danger. And let us not forget the moral of these catastrophes: you can't put a price on Life, you can't put a price on Freedom.

Introducing: Notes From Academic Explorers

Dear McNair Scholars, as we continue producing this newsletter we would like to invite you to take an active part in its production. Did you present at a conference or visit a grad school of interest? Do you have any experience-based grad faculty interviewing tips? Would you like to share your experiences of putting together a grad school application packet? Did you read an interesting article, report, or

book that you think may be helpful to other McNair scholars in their academic and professional endeavors? Do you know of an educational or professional opportunity that other McNair Scholars could benefit from? Whatever insight your academic exploration has given you, let us know or, if you wish, write a short article yourself! We will help you prepare and publish

these materials in the Newsletter. Specially for such materials we are now creating a new section titled Notes From Academic Explorers. We are grateful to those of you who you have already submitted materials and would like to encourage all of the Scholars to follow this lead. In this issue we begin with Joshua Randall's account of this summer's academic adventures.

Notes From Academic Explorers: Joshua Randall's Academic Summer '06

U of M

On Tuesday, July 11th, I visited my first graduate school. When I heard that McNair was taking a trip up to the University of Minnesota I wanted to go, but I did not really have any interest in the University. The reason I decided to attend was because I felt that visiting a grad school, any grad school, and meeting with a professor would help me prepare for campus visits that I truly was interested in. We left

bright and early at 7am, and during the summer, that can be quite early. When the van driven by Marla arrived at the University, we had to park in a parking structure that went 50 stories underground, I assume, and we parked at the bottom. The graduate professor that I met with was Edward Schiappa. The reason I decided to meet with Dr. Schiappa was because a former professor at Minnesota State recommended Dr. Schiappa and



Marla was able to schedule a meeting for me. My meeting with Dr. Schiappa went well, but it did not change my mind in
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Tips for Writing a Strong Statement of Purpose By Michelle Carter, Director

The statement of purpose is your opportunity to tell graduate admissions committees who you are and why you are an excellent candidate for their graduate programs. In this one to two page document, you may write about your preparation for graduate studies, your specific research interests and your career aspirations. Your main objective is to illustrate FIT. Tell the readers why your admission into their graduate program will be mutually beneficial.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

The first step in writing a good statement of purpose is to examine the profile of the graduate program and the faculty. Visit your prospective department's website and review the pages of faculty members of interest. Read some of the work of professors whose interests are compatible to yours and contact those professors, if time permits. Identify the strong points of the graduate program.

FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS

Read the Graduate Program's instructions. The statement of purpose is standard for many institutions; however, some graduate programs will want an autobiographical sketch and/or a statement of research interests in the place of a personal statement. Some schools will have specific questions that you are to answer. Know what the programs are asking for and give it to them.

ORGANIZE YOUR STATEMENT

You may use the following sample outline to organize your statement of purpose. However, if the graduate program has a specific format, follow that format to the letter.

Provide the reader with a compelling story for your intro. Address a relevant factor in your past that may have shaped your research and career interests. Provide no more than two lines on any economic hardship or obstacles you may have over-

come.

Construct a synopsis of your academic/research preparation for graduate study. Be sure to mention your involvement in the McNair Program. If you scored poorly on the GRE, address how your GRE scores are not a good indicator of your potential for success in grad school. Discuss your research experience and presentations.

Tell the committee why you want to attend their institution. Include factors such as faculty research, facilities, achievements of alumni, feedback from current graduate students, and mention your visit (if applicable).

Try to tie your conclusion back to the narrative in your introduction.

GET FEEDBACK

Ask your mentor and the McNair office staff to provide you with feedback on your statement of purpose. Give the faculty or staff member enough time to get back to you. You may also

want to ask a friend to critique your statement.

REVISE AND FINALIZE

Your statement of purpose is a living document and can always be improved. For example, you may have an idea about what a program is like, but then you may have a more detailed picture after conducting a campus visit. Remember that each statement of purpose should be tailored to fit the particular program that you are applying to. Although you may have a general framework, be sure to customize your statement. Double check the spelling of the institution and any professor's names. This statement may form the basis of your first and last impression. Lastly, remember that you have a lot to offer a graduate program. Do not be overly apologetic for any mistakes or misfortunes from your past. Leave the graduate admissions committee with a positive and lasting impression.

Notes From Academic Explorers: Joshua Randall's Academic Summer

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regards to attending The U. The best part about meeting with Dr. Schiappa was that from my meeting I was able to get a better understanding for what to expect when I meet with graduate faculty and what questions to ask in regards to graduate school admission.

Penn State

During the weekend of July 28th – July 30th I attended the Penn State McNair Research Conference at Penn State University. While I was at the conference I was able to present research that I worked on this summer. The conference was different than the conferences that I have attended in the past because it was not solely Communication research. At the conference, I had the opportunity to

receive free meals and stayed in a wonderful hotel. There was a Graduate Fair at the conference, which gave me the opportunity to meet with graduate admission and graduate professionals from Universities that I am considering attending. The greatest part of the conference was after I presented my research on Communication Apprehension with the possible solution of creating a Speech Help Center, someone approached me and told me that as a result of my presentation, they are going to look into creating a Help Center at their campus. It gave me a sense that I was not simply presenting research but providing an attempt for advocacy.

Graduate School Extravaganza

During the week of August

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Message From the G.A.



Dear McNair Scholars, welcome back! I

hope you successfully completed your research and made use of the summer opportunities to present your work to your professional and academic colleagues at MSU and elsewhere. I also hope your summer break was full of fun and excitement, that you feel rested and rejuvenated, and are energized to begin the new school year.

On my part, I am excited to have the opportunity to continue working with you during this school year. I would like to take a moment to encourage you to make use of the resources available through the MSU McNair program, any and all the help

that our staff, including myself, can offer you with your research, as well as graduate school search and application.

I hope you have found our individual meetings beneficial. I would like to encourage you to continue these meetings. Whether you need an audience to practice a presentation, would like feedback on a paper, or have a question I would be happy to help you. If I don't know the answer, I'll try to find someone who does! Even if you are on track and don't have any questions, do not hesitate to stop by say, hi and chitchat. I have thoroughly enjoyed our meetings this summer and the opportunities they presented for us to learn from one another, and it is my hope that they will continue. I wish you all a great Fall Semester!

Tips for Getting a Strong Recommendation Letter

Recommendation letters are among the most important factors in graduate school admissions decision making. After all, recommendations are some of the few non-quantitative pieces of information about you and your potential as a graduate student! For this reason it is vital to supply strong recommendations with your application. What does a good recommendation look like and how can you make sure that you get the strongest recommendation possible, you might ask? In addition, who should you ask? What should be included?

Usually graduate programs require three to four letters of recommendation from applicants. These can be from people who know you well and can attest to your academic abilities and professionalism as these qualities pertain to the likelihood of you being successful in graduate school. Here are some tips for you to obtain recommendations which are as strong and effective as possible.

CHOOSE YOUR RECOMMENDERS CAREFULLY

You should choose your recommenders from among your professors, mentors, advisors, or employers very carefully. On one hand, you want to make sure that your potential recommenders have a positive impression of you and your work – you earned good grades in their courses, got praise for performance on projects or papers, etc. On the other hand, strong recommendations can only come from people who worked with you closely and directly, such as your McNair mentors and academic advisors. A professor who you have only taken one course from may not know you well enough to give you a recommendation, even if you asked his or her class!

ASK FOR RECOMMENDATIONS IN A TIMELY FASHION

Make sure that your recommendation requests come well in

advance – at least four weeks prior to the deadlines. This will demonstrate your professionalism and your potential recommenders will appreciate it. After all, professors have a lot of responsibilities to juggle.

ASK FOR RECOMMENDATIONS IN PERSON

It is best to ask your potential recommenders in person. Be enthusiastic, yet tactful; explain and justify the objectives of your application: where are you applying? why do you think that you will do well in the target program? why you think this person will be able to speak to your qualifications for the position? A face-to-face request will also allow you to provide clarifying information by answering any questions your recommenders may have about the application.

ASK FOR STRONG RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition, don't just ask for a recommendation, ask whether your recommender feels comfortable writing a *strong* recommendation for you. And be attentive to the response you get. Sometimes professors may be reluctant because they do not feel they know you or your work well enough. In any case, it is better to get an "I'm not sure..." at this point than have a weak recommendation undermine your chances to get into the graduate program of your dream!

ASK FOR RECOMMENDATIONS THAT PROMOTE YOU

Your recommendation should speak to your potential in the target program. Avoid generic all-encompassing recommendations! In fact, your recommendations should be as specific as possible. Any general claims your recommenders may make about you should be backed by evidence, such as references to specifics of projects or assignments. In addition, if there may be weak or inconsistent aspects of your application, such as a GPA drop during a given semester, letters

of recommendation may help address these by providing explanations of the circumstances that may have contributed to such inconsistencies.

GIVE YOUR RECOMMENDERS INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

To make sure your recommenders can give you a concrete recommendation, provide them with the necessary information! Create a portfolio which you will give your recommenders when you ask them for the letter. Your recommenders are likely to expect you to provide them with certain pieces of information about you and your application, so don't hesitate to ask them what they may wish to review! Although different professors may ask for different kinds of information, have some of the most common materials prepared. State the purpose of your recommendation: are you applying to grad school, business school, law school, for an internship? Don't forget a statement of your research interests and career goals. Type up a list of courses you have taken, especially those courses you took from the recommender, and grades you received. Include GRE scores (if applicable), and cumulative as well as major GPA. Attach addressed and stamped envelopes and note the date the recommendations are due so that your recommenders can just mail the letters once they are finished with them.

Upcoming Events

University of Delaware National McNair Scholars Research Conference & Graduate School Fair will take place on October 6-7, 2006. Conference highlights include a keynote address by Dr. Katherine Conway-Turner, panel presentations and poster sessions providing Scholars an opportunity to discuss their research, interactive workshop sessions designed to prepare students for the graduate school transition, the Graduate School Fair featuring over thirty institutions, and performance by Bassline Entertainment. Presentations in all disciplines are welcome. Internal Deadline: September 22, 2006

Graduate and Professional School Day at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities will take place on Wednesday, October 11, 2006. About 100 graduate/professional programs and 900 students participate in the event. Graduate and Professional School Day is a great way to connect with a large number of graduate schools right here on campus! Get tips on funding graduate and professional school and learn how to navigate the application process. Learn about specific programs from graduate and professional school representatives. Collect application and financial aid information. Let Marla know if you are interested by September 29, 2006.

McNair Tutors & Schedules

Harrison Quick – Math

Tuesday: 11:00 – 3:00
 Thursday: 8:00 – 10:00
 11:00 – 3:00
 Friday: 8:00 – 10:00

Jessica Jorgenson – Writing/Verbal

Monday: 8:00 – 4:00
 Tuesday: 2:30 – 4:30
 Wednesday: 8:00 – 4:30
 Thursday: 8:00 – 4:30
 Friday: 12:30 – 4:30

Dan Ellis – Math/Writing/Verbal/Psychology

Monday: 3:30 – 5:30
 Tuesday: 8:00 – 11:00
 1:00 – 5:00
 Wednesday: 3:30 – 5:30
 Thursday: 8:00 – 11:00
 1:00 – 5:00
 Friday: 8:00 – 3:00

Ronald E. McNair Scholars
Postbaccalaureate Achievement
Program

Developing Leaders Through Graduate
Education

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Notes From Academic Explorers: Joshua Randall's Academic Summer '06

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14th – 22nd I visited six universities, drove over two thousand miles through six states, and stayed in two hotels. This Graduate School Extravaganza took me to Ball State University, Miami University, Ohio University, University of Akron, Kent State University, and Eastern Michigan University. I was able to meet with potential future graduate professors at all of those universities other than Eastern Michigan. Although it was summer, I was able to meet with individuals at those universities, because I contacted them in advance. I researched who I was interested in meeting with, told them when I was going to be in town, and asked if they would have time to meet with me, and I had great success with contacts. When I met with the Communication Studies Graduate Director at Kent State, he informed me that it was very rare to meet with someone in between their Junior and Senior year, but that he usually meets with prospective students in the second semester of their senior year. By meeting and visiting universities during the

summer, I did not have to worry about scheduling visits around school or classes. The best part of visiting all of these universities was getting a good sense of campuses and campus life and putting a face to a name that graduate faculty will see on applications when deciding who to give an assistantship to.

South Dakota

On Friday, September 8th I presented at the South Dakota Speech Communication Association Annual Conference in Watertown, South Dakota. While this is not a national conference, it was an opportunity to present research at a smaller local conference and get another line for my curriculum vita. The research that I presented at this conference was on Parliamentary Debate and I was on a panel with a professor that saw this conference and recommended I present my research. This conference was a great opportunity to present for an audience of professionals where I didn't necessarily recognize the audience and got an experience that most undergraduates do not.