

# McNair Scholars Program

## Southern Illinois University Carbondale

### Summer Research Institute 2011



For the past eight years, the McNair Summer Research Institute (SRI) has challenged some of the best and brightest students here at

SIUC to complete a research project in just eight short weeks. In addition to the research requirements, the scholars chosen to be part of this program also completed six weeks of intense GRE preparation classes. Needless to say, this fast pace envi-

ronment was challenging, but our students faced this challenge head on and the results speak volumes about the dedication and talent of our scholars. We are very proud of every one of them.

The McNair experience provides each cohort with bonding opportunities that are rare in



academia. Whether it is the ropes course at A Touch of Nature, or the campus wide scavenger hunt, scholars work with each other to overcome challenging obsta-

cles. The SRI pushes students outside of their comfort zones in a fun and safe environment. The bonds that are formed within each cohort are life lasting and powerful. Scholars learn how to network with their peers as well as their mentors. The wide variety

of disciplines amongst the McNair Scholars offers a unique all-encompassing experience for every participant, thereby enhancing the opportunities for learning. This year's SRI scholars mainly focused on qualitative research methods, though the McNair Scholars Program accepts the brightest individuals from multiple disciplines.



Elom Amuzu  
Psychology



Amber Blacharski  
Psychology



Marcus Brown  
Social Work



Darlyshia Cherry  
Speech Comm.



Larry Greene, Jr.  
Speech Comm.



An'Drea Hall  
Criminology/CJ  
& Sociology



Nathan May  
Forestry



Jessica Miller  
Linguistics



Crystal Newcomb  
Social Work



Anthony Steinmetz  
Anthropology



Esmeralda Zamora  
Criminology & CJ

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### *Is the gas hand in your car often on E?*

By: Shannell McGoy

Are you one of those people who think that E stands for Excited instead of Empty? What happens to your car if the gas hand stays on E and you don't fuel up? It may start to slow down, sputter, jerk a little bit, and eventually stop running. You are left on the side of road, stranded, late for class or work. If you are lucky a friend may bring you gas or give you a ride to your destination.

Have you ever stopped to think that the food you eat is the fuel that makes your body function? The importance of eating healthy is second nature to me as a Doctoral Candidate in Health Education and Recreation at SIUC. I found myself in class from what seemed like 8 am to 9 pm during my first year of course work. I

managed to sometimes eat a small bowl of Cheerio's for breakfast, but by late morning I was in class boxing with the sandman to keep my eyes open. My notes looked as if I was learning to write the alphabet for the very first time. During my coherent moments, my classmates were laughing at my nodding head

as I drifted in and out of sleep. By noon, I grabbed a Snickers and Mountain Dew from the vending machine between Pulliam and Wham to stop my stomach from answering questions in my next class. At 9 pm, I was home eating McDonald's or whatever fast food my car led me to along the ride home. Reading and writing with potato chips and cookies as companions until sunrise was my task. The plan was to do it all over again the next day. This routine of not eating enough, eating the wrong

food, not getting enough sleep, and being stressed eventually caught up with me. It is still unclear what happened, I just remember sitting at a computer trying to meet a deadline when I got a horrendous headache, the room went and started spinning. I felt nauseous and wanted to hide from all light, like Dracula. My body was running low on fuel much like a car on E (empty).

I've changed my lifestyle and be-

gun to practice what I taught in my Foundations of Health Education HED 101 class. The USDA urges people to think of healthy eating habits by replacing the Food Pyramid with My Plate. The message is as simple as: make half your plate fruits and vegetables, the other half grains and protein, and drink water instead of sugary drinks. Now, my breakfast consists of a scrambled egg, a piece of toast, occasionally a piece of meat, and fruit. I pack snacks such as trail mix and fruits and vegetables purchased at the Farmers Market along with a lunch that consists of a salad or sandwich. No longer am I eating fast food for dinner. Now, I make sure to bake chicken on the weekends to have for dinner throughout the week. Also, I carry water with me to drink throughout the day to prevent feelings of fatigued that may arise from dehydration. I am planning an extravagant graduation party with the money I've saved by not eating out.



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### **Research Advice**

*Students who have already completed the SRI provide tips for conducting research successfully*

I wish I would have known how to use SPSS. I had to learn how to use the program on top of doing all the work. If your project involves any program you're not familiar with, read up on how to use it the week between finals and SRI.

-Esmeralda Zamora-

Consider a familiar research topic. What I mean is something that you are very interested in and have researched prior to academic research and something that crosses your mind frequently. This may seem difficult to pinpoint but with some brainstorming the topic will become clear. Good Luck.

~Anthony Steinmetz ~

Don't be intimidated by your mentor. They are just as excited about your project as you are. They enjoy answering questions, so never be afraid to ask a certain question because that is the best way to learn!

~Kimberly Elsenbroek~

When choosing a topic or research question for a research project make sure it is something that you think you might enjoy spending a lot of time learning about.

~Crystal Newcomb~

I wish I had known that it really was tough, but also rewarding. I spent hours upon hours in my office, sometimes from 6 A.M. to 10 P.M., only to do it again the next day, even on weekends. As daunting as that may sound, I know that I can do anything I put my mind to now, and that is worth more than any frustration I experienced.

~Jessi Miller~

The most important part is asking questions. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It shows that you're interested, reduces mistakes, and you learn something new.

~Esmeralda Zamora~

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### ***Interview About Graduate School***

*With Sydney Dillard, McNair Alum and Founder of SPEAR*

#### **Tell us what you are currently undertaking (working, school, etc.)**

Currently, I am a doctoral candidate at Purdue University in the Communication department. I'm on the job market, looking for Assistant Professor positions in media, health communication, and/or advertising. In case some students are wondering what being a "doctoral candidate" means; it is when you've finished taking all your course work and passed your qualifying written and oral exams. At this point, I am collecting data for my dissertation and planning to defend and graduate May 2012!

#### **What advice do you have about applying to graduate schools?**

If possible, consider locations outside of the state you are from. Also, if you are applying to a school to work with a specific professor, make sure you have a clear understanding whether that professor has plans to stay at the university for the amount of time you plan on being there. For instance, as a doctoral student, you will likely want someone you know will be or plans to be at the university for at least four years. Sometimes this is easier to do when working with Associate and full Professors. It's been my experience that junior faculty are more likely to leave a university if he/she does not have tenure. It is never easy to finish a graduate degree when your primary advisor leaves the university, which happens very often in graduate school. Although sometimes this cannot be avoided, it is always good to ask before accepting any offers from universities.

#### **How did you choose which schools to apply to?**

I choose based on how well the schools ranked in my area of study. I applied to at least 3 of the top ten schools in the US, and had another 2-3 alternatives that I thought fit my location preferences or had faculty whose interests coincided with my own research interests.

#### **How did your time in the McNair Scholars Program help you to get to where you are today?**

There is no doubt about it, I would not be here without the love and support of McNair at SIU. They introduced me to research, which most undergraduates don't have the chance to experience. In addition, it provided opportunities such as funding for research and help with application fees, which can be quite difficult to come up with on an undergraduate or even graduate student budget. Finally, and most importantly, they gave me the confidence to feel like I could survive graduate school and get a doctorate. When you go to a department and you are the only one of anything, whether it be racial, ethnic background, socioeconomic, or social class...whatever makes you different from a majority of the students in graduate school, it can be quite intimidating. However, McNair provided the foundation for me to see my differences as a strength and as an added source of diversity among those whom I work with. They valued my background and taught me to value it too.

#### **What is something you wish you would have done differently during your senior year?**

I probably would have tried to get my McNair paper published in a peer reviewed journal. This is not to say that the McNair Journal is not great, because it is, but I was a little lazy back then and didn't take the initiative to do that. As I'm moving on to become an Assistant Professor, I'm also learning the importance of publishing and the merit that accompanies this accomplishment.

#### **What was the best part of your college experience?**

The best part of my college experience has and always will be the wealth of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances I've made. Through college you really should be networking and meeting people so that you can have more opportunities in the future. This doesn't mean go around using people or being an opportunist, but making genuine friendships brings about many unseen opportunities.

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### Graduate School



As the new semester starts, it is time to start thinking about graduate school. While our graduating class of 2011 has entered the world of academia, our current seniors are just beginning the process of applying to multiple schools. Choosing the proper graduate program is not as simple as it seems. There are a few things to carefully consider:

First ask the question:

*What do I want to do for the rest of my life? Is the discipline I have currently chosen going to benefit my needs later on?*

Surprisingly, many scholars are unfamiliar with the fact that you can change your discipline after graduating with your Bachelor's. In this very competitive world, you want to find your right niche, and some students might need to tailor their graduate experience to a degree that suits them.

Another question to ask:

*Are my goals realistic?*

When deciding on which graduate schools to apply to, identify three that you dream about, four that your chances are realistic, and three that you know you will get into for sure.

*What are the courses like? How long does it take the average student to graduate?*

Probably the most important question is: *How will I be funded?*

Finding a school to fund your education is half of the battle for attending graduate school. There are a few different ways in which a school might financially assist: fellowships, assistantships, or scholarships. The alternative is student loans, but they should only be taken as a last resort because they must be repaid. Contact the schools that you are interested in and see what types of funding are available.



You might want to think about location:

*What is the climate? What's the size of the town? Is the population diverse? Is there access to public transportation? How far will you be from home?*

You will be living in this place for the next few years of your life. These are very important factors to consider.

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### Graduate School (con't)

#### **Thinking about your grad school options? Overwhelmed with the application process?**

This important step can be daunting, yet there are tips and tricks that you can access to make the process easier. Because it is sometimes easier to see things you should have handled differently when you are on the other side of the process, SIU McNair alumni look back on their graduate school application process and weigh in with some helpful advice for current scholars who may be applying.

*I am currently working as a school social worker for St. Louis Public Schools. I am also in the Leadership in Educational Administration PhD program at Capella University. I am in the middle of taking my comprehensive exams. Then, I will start working on my dissertation. My advice is to apply to programs early. Do not wait until the last minute. Also, review programs that are similar to your undergraduate major and programs that would complement your Bachelor's degree. Your graduate degree does not have to be the same as your undergraduate degree. I selected a program outside of my undergraduate major and it worked out great. Think outside the box and explore new opportunities.*

*~Tesha Robinson~*

*I am working for the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health in Chicago, IL as a Youth Development Coordinator. I implement sexual health education curriculum into foster care homes and facilitate a youth advisory board as a part of an evidenced based research study. I graduated with my master's in Public Health from Southern Illinois University, August 2011. You have to network and reach out to your professors and mentors. Professional development is key. You have to develop your skill-set (communication, business etiquette, writing abilities, etc.). You have to have a willingness to humble yourself, and learn from others as well.*

*It is best to choose your school by the program, and not the school itself. There are great programs out there. I chose SIUC because of the great program and reputation in the health education field. There are only 4 CEPH accredited programs in Illinois. SIU is one of them. You have to look at things like accreditation, and choose a program that fits you as a person and your research interests.*

*I would not be in grad school if it were not for McNair. I was not the best public speaker, my writing skills were meager, and I had no idea of the effort it took to get into graduate school. When I got in, it was easy for me to assimilate because I had research experience, I was given so many resources, I improved my skill-set, and I just felt confident.*

*I wish I would have taken advantage of going to more conferences, and submitting my research for more publications. This is an attribute that sets you apart from many candidates. I became more progressive in my thinking. I became more accepting of others and their ideas. I freed myself from the bondage of judging others. When you can listen to many great minds and not judge, you can learn and teach others at the same time.*

*~Vernon L. Johnson, MPH~*

*My experience as a McNair Scholar prepared me for the reality of being one of few graduate students in my masters and doctoral programs that comes from a racial and socioeconomic minority background. Because of McNair, I learned to anticipate the challenges associated with these multiple minority statuses before I arrived and was therefore able to navigate those challenges better upon arrival.*

*~Krishna Pattisapu~*

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### *Financial Literacy: Credit Cards*

The other day while I was at the checkout counter, the sales clerk asked me if I would like to sign up for a credit card. I could get pre-approved on the spot and could even save 15% on my purchase that I was making right then! This would have been a treat and even an honor for me but I realized that I had been offered credit cards in almost every store I went into. It has become increasingly popular for stores to have their own cards and to get people to open up accounts, but what does this do to one's credit?

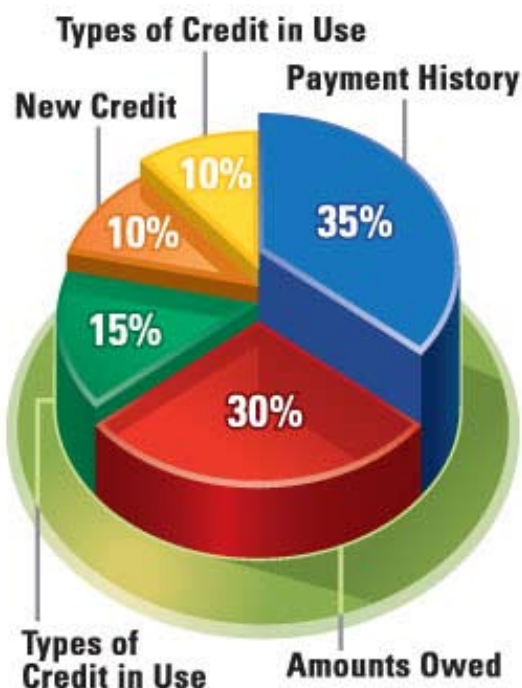
#### How is credit calculated?

It's not really the amount of credit cards you have, although it's often recommended to stick to as few as possible. The main thing is how well you can manage your cards. If you can manage and keep track of what percentage of the limit you put on each card and can balance paying off multiple accounts on time, then your credit score will not be negatively affected.

CashCourse recommends the following for maintaining good credit:

- Avoid having more than two credit cards.
- Pay bills in full and on time.
- Limit use of credit—be a convenience user.
- Use one card for all expenditures so you can track expenses.
- Contact creditor immediately if you are struggling to make payments.

*From CashCourse "Money Management" Lesson*



#### Factors that Influence Credit Score

These percentages are based on the importance of the five categories for the general population. For particular groups - for example, people who have not been using credit long - the importance of these categories may be somewhat different.

From: MyFICO website : [myfico.com/crediteducation](http://myfico.com/crediteducation)