

FOR UNIVERSITY
OF NORTHERN COLORADO
ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

Northern

VISION

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Above and Beyond

Northern Colorado
McNair Scholars
Set Their Sights High

HONORED ALUMNI >> A NEW ERA OF BEARS FOOTBALL

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ABOVE AND BEYOND

NORTHERN COLORADO MCNAIR SCHOLARS

SET THEIR SIGHTS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

WHEN RONALD ERWIN MCNAIR WAS KILLED IN THE SPACE SHUTTLE CHALLENGER EXPLOSION in January 1986, he left behind more than a nation that mourned for the loss of him and six other astronauts. Today, thousands of undergraduate students across the country conduct graduate-level research, present their findings and attend graduate school, all in honor of McNair, the son of an auto mechanic who persevered through poverty and prejudice to earn a PhD in physics, join NASA and become the second African-American in space.

After McNair died, Congress approved funding for the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, or the McNair Scholars Program. The program provides a paid six-week internship to undergraduates nationwide who complete graduate-level research projects and receive help in ap-

Pictured above is Ronald McNair, the second African-American in space, for whom the McNair Scholars Program is named.

plying for graduate school. The point of the program is to diversify those who pursue post-graduate degrees, which is why McNair students are either first-generation college students and meet federal low-income guidelines; or they come from underrepresented groups in graduate pro-

grams. The University of Northern Colorado received its first McNair grant in 1995 and each year 30 UNC students—15 juniors and 15 seniors—become McNair Scholars. Here are just a few of their stories.



A FATHER'S WISDOM

"I WOULD LIKE TO BE HALF THE MAN my dad is someday," says 20-year-old Alonzo Barron, a senior majoring in Chicano Studies and English. "I don't have half the brains he does and he has gained all his knowledge through life and experience." Barron's parents, originally from Mexico, never attended high school. Genaro and Irma Barron immigrated to California as teenagers and their four children were born in Los Angeles. When Alonzo was 12, his parents moved the family to the Denver area. "Los Angeles is a tough city, especially for children from poor backgrounds," Barron says. "So we moved to Colorado and started from scratch."

Barron's father works two jobs to make ends meet for his family. He gets up early to work in a silver- and gold-plating factory in Denver and in the evenings he works in the gift shop and as a van driver at a Red Lion Hotel. That's also where Barron's mother works. "My parents always did so much for us," Barron says. "They showed us we could have a dignified life if we worked hard." His parents also encouraged him to go to college. When he was a freshman at UNC, a friend and mentor told him about the benefits of the McNair Scholars Program.

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When Barron started college, he wanted to be an Eng-

lish teacher. But his goals have evolved and he added another major, Chicano Studies. Barron now aspires to be a college professor and help citizens of developing countries with human rights and social justice issues. This fits in perfectly with being a McNair Scholar because in order to join the program, students' career goals must include graduate school. "Just saying you think it would be neat to get a master's or a PhD isn't enough," says Kim Black, who directed the McNair program for five years

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before becoming UNC's interim director of assessment this past July. "There has to be a definite reason to go to graduate school."

Barron's mother wants him to stay close to home for graduate school, and he, too, feels torn about the possibility of leaving Colorado and his younger siblings. But his dad has told him to go where he needs to go. "All my dad's words of wisdom have paid off," Barron says. "When I get my degree next year, it will be as much his as it is mine."





A PROFESSOR'S INFLUENCE

ONE DAY IN JOSEPH HAMM'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE CLASS, four students stormed into the room and doused the teacher, Assistant Professor of Psychology Doug Woody, with giant water guns. Directly after the incident, Woody asked students in the class to describe what happened, and most of them gave an inaccurate account. The exer-

cise was a creative classroom experiment in eyewitness psychology—and Hamm was hooked.

Based on his academic interests, Hamm later asked Woody to be his faculty mentor for the McNair Scholars Program. In addition to conducting a yearlong research project, McNair students choose a faculty member to help guide their research. The students must carefully choose their mentors because the relationship has to be a good fit for both the student and the professor, much like a faculty-to-student relationship in graduate school. "I consider myself a tour guide," says Thomas Dunn, an associate professor of psy-

Hamm's research project focused on jury decision-making.

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chology who has mentored several McNair Scholars. "I point to a destination, and it's the student's job to take the journey. I'm just along for the ride."

Hamm, 21, chose a research project on jury decision-making, a subject that fascinated him and is one of Woody's areas of expertise. Woody has researched how a defendant's age affects a jury's decision, and Hamm took it a step further by looking at how a defendant's competency—whether he or she understands the judicial process and can communicate with an attorney—affects verdicts.

Currently a senior majoring in criminal justice and psychology, Hamm hopes to earn a PhD in social psychology and to become a trial consultant or a college professor someday. He's also considering law school. In addition to presenting his research project at the national McNair conference at the University of Tennessee this past summer, Hamm may present his findings at the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association conference next year. "Working with Professor Woody changed my relationships with other teachers," Hamm says. "I realized I can talk to them and approach them as mentors, not just professors."

MCNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM FACTS

STUDENTS NEED TO HAVE A GRADE-POINT AVERAGE of 3.0 or greater to apply for the program. They must also be first-generation college students and meet federal low-income guidelines; or come from underrepresented groups in graduate programs, including Hispanic, African-American, Native American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

180 STUDENTS HAVE GRADUATED from the UNC McNair program since it started in 1995.

55 PERCENT HAVE COMPLETED or are currently enrolled in graduate school.

20 PERCENT ARE ENROLLED in or have completed doctoral programs.

THE FIRST UNC MCNAIR scholar to earn a PhD will do so in Dec. 2006 from UNC's school psychology program.

SCHOLARS HAVE GONE ON to attend graduate school at universities including Cornell, New York University, Pepperdine, George Washington University, Penn State and the University of Wisconsin.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

THE UNC MCNAIR PROGRAM IS DIFFERENT from the 178 other McNair programs across the country because it requires students to take four credits of research-methods courses in the fall and spring of their junior year. Scholars start research during the school year, and then complete it and write up their findings during a six-week summer research internship that provides a \$2,800 stipend plus living expenses.

The internship is followed by a trip to a national McNair conference, where students present their research findings to other scholars from across the country. During the second year, students also receive help preparing their applications to graduate school and preparing for standardized tests, such as the Graduate Record Exam.

A MOTHER'S SACRIFICE

COLORADO WEATHER MADE QUITE AN IMPRESSION on Mariana Felix after she left her native Brazil. During afternoon thunderstorms at her home near Denver International Airport, Felix would wait for her mom to come home from work while television and radio broadcasters warned of tornadoes and hail. Instead of taking cover, Felix would poke her head out the door to take a closer look at what was happening. "It's summer all year round in Brazil," Felix explains. "We don't have anything like the crazy thunderstorms and snow in Colorado." Felix, 22, is now a senior studying meteorology and telecommunications at UNC. She hopes to become a professor at some point in the future.

When Felix was 11 years old, she came to the United States with her mother and sister. Her parents divorced when she was young, and her father and stepmother still live in Brazil. Felix, her mom and sister moved to Aurora

FELIX'S GOALS INCLUDE TEACHING

AND CONDUCTING COOPERATIVE

METEOROLOGICAL RESEARCH

WITH UNIVERSITIES IN BRAZIL.

at the encouragement of Felix's aunt, who had come to the states about 10 years before. The aunt had encouraged Felix's mother to make the change to give her daughters an opportunity to pursue a secondary education in the United States and maybe even attend college. Felix, whose native language is Portuguese, learned English in just one year and entered a mainstream classroom at East Middle School in Aurora.

Felix is currently in the process of researching graduate programs at Colorado State, Texas A&M and the University of Alabama-Huntsville, among others. She wants to teach

Felix came to the U.S. from Brazil when she was 11 years old.

and do research at an American university and someday conduct cooperative meteorological research with universities in Brazil. Felix's mother now works

as a janitor, and she's saving her money to retire and return to Brazil. "She hasn't been able to become fluent in English

because of a hearing problem she has," Felix says. "It's been hard for her here."

Still, Felix says her mom is glad she brought her children to the United States a decade ago. If they hadn't left, Felix would have never known the thrill of watching a dark Colorado sky exploding with lightning, hail and tornadoes. "My mom wants to go back to Brazil, but she's glad I want to stay," Felix says. "She's 100 percent supportive of what I want to do."

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