The start of a new academic year is always an exciting time. This year it’s doubly so for the McNair Scholars Program. I’m thrilled to announce the successful renewal of the program’s grant from the U.S. Department of Education, which will carry us forward for another five years on campus.

The new grant cycle will bring about exciting changes to the program, including:

- relocation to our new home in the Center for the Sciences and Innovation;
- the unveiling of the Post-baccalaureate Access Network, an integrated system of WiFi-enabled tablet computers provided to all McNair Scholars, staff, and tutorial faculty to achieve program goals; and
- a revamped academic counseling curriculum that takes full advantage of remote learning technologies to support scholarship and communication across the disciplines.

The grant competition was especially competitive this time around—regrettably, a number of successful programs throughout the U.S. fell victim to federal budget writers—so the Trinity community should be especially proud of the accomplishment. To the many faculty and staff who made the grant renewal possible, my sincerest and deepest thanks!

June brought our Scholars a plethora of information about research and graduate school. On June 8, Pat Spencer, student success coordinator at the University of North Texas (UNT)Toulouse Graduate School, came to San Antonio and visited with our Scholars. During lunch at Mi Tierra and a tour of Trinity’s campus, Pat discussed graduate school in general, specific opportunities at UNT, and possible contacts for our Scholars.

A few weeks later on June 23, seven Scholars attended “Strategies for Gaining Admission to Highly Competitive Graduate Programs” at the University of the Incarnate Word. The full-day event featured Donald Asher, renowned for his expertise in the graduate school admissions process. Senior Si Ying Li-Gonzalez, who attended the session, said it was, “a must for all of those considering graduate school. It is even helpful for medical school students.”

To round out the month, Francisco Piña, recruitment coordinator, visited our campus on June 27 to discuss research and graduate school opportunities about the University of Illinois Chicago. He specifically highlighted the fact that UIC is the largest research university in Chicago and discussed the wide variety of degrees offered. He also touched upon their Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP) and encouraged our rising juniors to apply for next year. What an exciting and informative month!!

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2012 Summer Research Experience

This summer an unprecedented 23 Scholars conducted research at Trinity, while several of our Scholars completed research at locations outside of Trinity. Within San Antonio, senior Lauren Holguin helped with a study at Southwest Research Institute; seniors Tanvi Patel, Melissa Delcont, and Samantha Gonzalez conducted research at the University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio; junior Megan Garcia worked with a professor at the University of Texas San Antonio; and juniors Valerie Martinez and Shacoya Atkins completed a data analysis at the Battered Women and Children’s Shelter. Senior Victoria Gbenjo completed her research internship at the Gait Study Center at the Temple University School of Podiatric Medicine. Finally, senior Jena Daggett was accepted to the National Science Foundation (NSF) Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) in Civil Conflict Management and Peace Science at the University of North Texas (UNT).

The summer culminated in the 7th Annual Summer Undergraduate Research Conference, a two-day event where students presented their findings via a poster or talk. The 5th Annual McNair Summer Research Banquet, featuring engineering science professor Jack Leifer as keynote speaker, honored the Scholars’ accomplishments.

Several Scholars got a very special treat this summer when John Gramieri, mammal curator, gave us a behind-the-scenes tour of the San Antonio Zoological Gardens & Aquarium on July 1. By far, the most exciting part of the day was when we went into the rhinoceros exhibit to pet Kutu, one of the residents! Gramieri and the rest of the staff were extremely welcoming and shared a lot of facts about the zoo in general, the animals they currently house, the background and education required to work at the zoo, and tips on how to secure an internship. It was a very enjoyable and informative day, and we are thankful to everyone for making it happen!
On Saturday, June 9, seven Scholars and Teresa Morrison, assistant director, attended the 42nd Annual Texas Folklife Festival at the Institute of Texan Cultures in downtown San Antonio. As the largest three-day cultural celebration in the state, the festival highlights the food, dancing, crafts, stories, and music of over 40 ethnic groups.

Si Ying Li, a senior biology major, sums up the experience: “Texas Folklife Festival was a wonderful outing to be educated about Texas culture at an easy pace filled with interesting things to see and eat! You may be surprised what you will learn even if you are a Texan.”

Si Ying Li, a senior biology major, sums up the experience: “Texas Folklife Festival was a wonderful outing to be educated about Texas culture at an easy pace filled with interesting things to see and eat! You may be surprised what you will learn even if you are a Texan.”

This summer several of our Scholars participated in a wonderful opportunity to assist local high school students. On June 29, Simone Carnegie-Diaz, director of Trinity’s Upward Bound (UB) Program, hosted a film screening of the award-winning documentary First Generation. As part of the event, she invited McNair Scholars to attend the screening with the Upward Bound students and participate in a panel discussion after the film.

According to the film’s promotional materials, “First Generation tells the story of four high school students who set out to break the cycle of poverty and bring hope to their families and communities by pursuing a college education. The documentary explores the problem of college access faced by first generation and low-income students and how their success has major implications for the future of our nation.”

Seniors Christina Cooney, Mellissa Delcont, Samantha Gonzalez and Si Ying Li and juniors Valerie Martinez and Katy Yachinich discussed how their experiences have been similar to or different from the students in the film, explained how they navigated the system when applying to college, offered advice on how they have become successful college students, and answered questions from the UB students. The event, which was also attended by guest panelist Sheryl Tynes, associate vice president for Academic Affairs at Trinity, was a hit among UB students and Scholars alike. Si Ying felt the screening “was great to teach high schoolers about pitfalls in the college application process. It made me very sad to see other students not receiving the help they needed and thankful for my high school teachers and counselors. It also made me grateful to be able to pass on some knowledge and tips about the application process during the panel.” Samantha concurred. “My favorite event was without a doubt the First Generation screening because we had the opportunity to give advice to rising college freshman about entering college. It’s crazy to think that that was us about three years ago! A panel like this should definitely be done again for next year!”

We were thankful for the invitation from Upward Bound and would happily participate in this event again.
Welcome!

NEW SCHOLARS 2012-2013

Ambreen Hooda  
(JR) English  
Houston

Anthia Liu  
(SO) business, interdisciplinary  
Richmond, Texas

Alyssa Parra  
(SO) economics, environ. studies  
San Antonio

Rosa Olivares  
(SO) chemistry  
San Antonio

Vanessa Ortiz  
(JR) anthropology  
Laredo

Tae-Hyun Sakong  
(SO) biology  
University Place, Wash.

Scholar Achievements

Congratulations to senior Mellissa Delcont, who led the Trinity University Neuroscience Club to a first place Brain Bowl victory. “Brain Bowl is a quiz bowl-like competition hosted by the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio in which three undergraduate institutions compete to answer questions about advanced neuroscience topics,” explains Mellissa. “Winning was an amazing experience because it showed that Trinity University is really providing us with a strong education about neuroscience and the brain. I was also able to showcase my knowledge and experience to faculty at UTHSCSA, which enabled me to establish some important connections.”

Senior Laura Sandling was chosen to attend the American Sociological Association (ASA) Honors Program held in Denver last month during the ASA Annual Meeting. Laura was encouraged to apply by Amy Stone, associate professor of sociology and McNair tutorial faculty, after performing well in her Social Research Design course. “I loved Denver and it was such a great experience. I really enjoyed meeting some of my favorite sociologists and hearing the various lectures by some of the biggest names in the field. I also enjoyed networking with students who really love sociology and meeting current graduate students at some of my dream schools,” Laura said upon her return. Way to go, Laura!

Mellissa Delcont, left, led the Neuroscience Club to victory in the Brain Bowl. Laura Sandling, right, attended the American Sociological Association Honors Program last month in Denver.
Fall 2012 Welcome Back Meeting

On August 23, Scholars and staff met at the home of assistant director Teresa Morrison for the fall 2012 Welcome Back Meeting. We enjoyed grilled burgers, hotdogs, and sausages as we discussed the fall calendar, GNED courses, and the updated Scholar Handbook. It was great to see everyone, and we all enjoyed meeting the new Scholars and catching up with old friends! ▼

Congratulations to our May 2012 Graduates!

Rachel Alley
B.S., engineering science

Karen Artola-Gonzalez
B.A., political science

Rebecca Carey
B.A., psychology and Chinese magna cum laude

Peggy Biyi Guo
B.S., biochemistry and molecular biology summa cum laude

John Kerr
B.S., engineering science

Aimee Vidaurri
B.A., political science and international studies

Kristine Yi
B.A., sociology

Our Scholars have received admission to graduate programs across the country, including:

- Baylor College of Medicine
- Cornell University
- Louisiana State University Law Center
- Northeastern University School of Law
- The Pennsylvania State University
- Purdue University
- Sam Houston State University
- Stanford University
- St. Mary’s University
- University of Kansas School of Law
- University of Michigan
- University of South Carolina
- University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio
- University of Tulsa School of Law
- University of Washington

Congratulations to our May 2012 Graduates!
Alumni Spotlight: Where are they now?

Jonelle Bailey joined the McNair Scholars Program at Trinity University in December 2007 as part of the very first cohort. She graduated from Trinity with a bachelor of arts in Spanish and religion in 2008, and then earned her master of arts in teaching in 2009, also from Trinity. Jonelle teaches Spanish at Bush High School in Houston. This past summer she also taught 3- and 4-year-olds at a private school, incorporating Spanish in the curriculum.

After much researching and planning—including taking the GRE—Jonelle went back to graduate school this summer! In May 2012 she became part of the first cohort of the Ed.D. program in Developmental Education Administration at Sam Houston State University. In fact, Jonelle started on the exact last day of school for her high school students and graduation day for her seniors. “It was my first graduation to participate in and I recall during practice the day before that a past student and soon-to-be graduate mentioned attending Sam Houston State and very excitedly saying, ‘me, too.’”

Jonelle wants to “really give back and serve. My hope is to be in a position through educational growth to teach at an institution of higher education and to have the opportunity to work with students as part of a non-profit Christian organization that does mission work and provides health care and educational opportunities to Third World countries.” We are very proud of Jonelle and all her accomplishments!

Cristina (Lopez) Lara was also a member of the very first McNair cohort at Trinity. She completed a Bachelor of Arts in urban studies and speech communication with a minor in Spanish in December of 2008. After graduation, Cristina worked as a research analyst with PennWell MapSearch in Houston, known for their oil and gas magazine publications. In September 2009, she was promoted to a geographic information systems (GIS) technician role, and in May 2010, she began a Master of Business Administration program at Tulane University. “The professional program allowed me to continue my career at MapSearch and attend classes on the weekend,” Cristina says. “Juggling my academic, professional, and personal life was truly a balancing act. Fortunately, my husband and I were both in the same program, which made [it] a little easier.”

Mid-way through the MBA program, in April of 2011, she was recruited to work for Barclays’ Natural Resources Investment Banking Division (IBD) in Houston. “It was a perfect move incorporating my oil and gas experience, MBA coursework, and GIS knowledge,” explains Cristina. She recently graduated from Tulane with a Master of Business Administration (finance and management) on August 4, 2012.

Cristina will soon earn GIS professional certification through the GIS Certification Institute. She is also a member of the Houston Chapter of SWIGGIS (Supporting Women in GIS and Geography) and hopes to help recruit more women, particularly young professionals, to join. In the past two years, she and her husband have travelled to Panama, Guatemala, and China with their MBA class and were also able to extend their personal travel to Costa Rica, New Zealand, and Australia. “Now that we have the travel bug, I cannot wait to see where we’ll go next. In the meantime, my personal plans include taking some time to smell the roses with my husband and 4-year-old Labrador after an eventful four years of transitioning!”

As far as advice for other Scholars, Cristina says, “My academic and professional career path was quite unique, as it should be. No two paths are alike. In all that you do, surround yourself with great leaders and make every moment you can a learning experience.” Well said, Cristina, and congratulations!
since the fall of 2005.

An avid researcher, Leifer has completed research in a number of areas, but ones always “highly applied in nature.” Most recently, he’s been investigating a passive method for reducing the vibrations transmitted to operators of string trimmers (weed whackers) and has been looking at how photographs can be used to determine the severity of automobile collisions. “Like most Trinity students, my interests are not focused on just one academic area. This is one of the reasons that my work with McNair is rewarding. It allows me to interact with faculty and students from all academic areas. Furthermore, the cultural and social opportunities that we make available to McNair students are also enriching for me.” Leifer sings baritone with the Trinity Choral Union and directs “The Moody Blues,” an informal engineering student a cappella group. Despite working in a quickly advancing field, he doesn’t necessarily subscribe to many modern technologies and has “come to enjoy regularly using items that others might view as obsolete.” He appreciates the original fixtures of his 1962 house, typically uses a variety of fountain pens that belonged to his grandparents, sometimes drives a vintage car to campus, is learning to use a slide rule that was his father’s when he was in school, and until recently always had a least one rotary phone in his house.

When asked about his return to the McNair staff, Leifer said, “I’m looking forward to it. All programs evolve, and I know that in my three years away, the McNair Program at Trinity has become both well known and well respected, in no small part because of the success of the program’s alumni. I am proud to have helped (in a small way) to get the program off the ground and thrilled to have the privilege of renewing my association.”

The privilege is certainly ours!

More Summer Researchers

Senior Si Ying Li worked with chemistry professor Michelle Bushey for the second summer in a row on capillary electrochromatography. Psychology professor Paula Hertel and Kevin McIntyre mentored senior Jonathan Gallegos on his project on self-esteem.
This ominous knight was protecting the Scotch eggs and fish and chips sampled—with mixed reviews—by Terrin Blackmon, Devon Powers, Victor Rodriguez, Melissa Delcont, and Si Ying Li at the Texas Folklife Festival in June. See story on page 3.

McNair Scholars Program

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Assistant Director: Teresa Morrison, M.A.E.
Program Specialist: Kimberly Cabe, B.S.
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Amy Stone, Ph.D. (sociology)
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