This past June marked a first for the McNair Scholars Program at Trinity University: Three of our alumni Scholars, all graduate students at some of the nation’s leading institutions of higher learning, shared their experiences and their advice with current undergraduate Scholars via Skype videoconference. The moment spotlights three important milestones for the Program and for the University.

First, we now have a robust number of alumni Scholars in the graduate school pipeline. Before long, they will take their place among the ranks of professionals in higher education. Our alumni Scholars are not only experts in their respective fields; they’re also glad to share their wisdom and to model success for others like them.

Second, the Program succeeds despite diminished federal resources. Like virtually all federally-funded efforts, the Program was forced by the sequestration process to trim its budget. Bringing together alumni Scholars virtually from across the continent represents just one way that the Program leverages technology to achieve its goals with great efficiency. None of this would be possible without Trinity’s state-of-the-art facilities and its truly gifted staff.

Third, Trinity delivers world-class training across the entire span of disciplines. Our virtual symposium included former Scholars pursuing advanced degrees in biochemistry (Ph.D.), maritime studies (M.A.), and sociology (Ph.D.). Later that day, we enjoyed lunch—in person—with a former Scholar on her way to a Ph.D. in psychology. All of our alumni Scholars agreed that Trinity’s rigorous curriculum and its rich offerings in undergraduate research set them on a clear path to a graduate degree.

Michael Soto
On Wednesday, June 12, we were lucky enough to visit with not just one, but four McNair alumni!

The day started off with our SRE Weekly Wednesday Workshop “Graduate Research: A Virtual Symposium,” during which we were joined by alumni Stephanie Croatt, Charlie Mitchell, and Nancy Nguyen. With the expertise and dedicated assistance of Paul Feuerbacher, media productions technician in Trinity’s CLT, we were able to visit with these Scholars from all over the country via Skype.

Stephanie had just returned to her hometown in Richmond, Texas, after having completed her M.A. in maritime studies at East Carolina University in May. Charlie joined us from Baltimore, Md., where he began his third year as a Ph.D. student in sociology at Johns Hopkins University this fall, and Nancy called in from here in town. She recently completed her M.S. in nutrition science at the University of the Incarnate Word and now is in her second year of the University of Texas Health Science Center’s Ph.D. program in biomedical science.

These Scholars were invited to share their experiences with research at the graduate level, including how their undergraduate research experiences and participation in other McNair programming was helpful in their graduate pursuits. They graciously answered questions from the summer researchers and McNair staff and offered a lot of great stories, tips, and advice. It was really nice to see their smiling faces on the big screen!

Later that afternoon, we had the pleasure of having a lunch discussion with alumna Rebecca Carey.

Rebecca graduated from Trinity in 2012 and will be embarking on her second year of a Ph.D. program in psychology at Stanford University this fall. Rebecca spent nearly two hours with our Scholars discussing all the ins and outs of graduate school, including her process for applying to programs, how she chose Stanford, ways she felt she was and was not prepared for graduate studies, her position as a teaching assistant, and much, much more. It was a wonderful discussion full of tremendous insight and lots of advice for our Scholars to take away. We’re glad Rebecca could make the trip back to San Antonio and spend some time with us.

Rebecca Croatt visited with Scholars during her recent visit to San Antonio.
2013 Summer Research Experience

From May 20-July 27, thirteen Scholars (three rising juniors and ten rising seniors) completed the 2013 McNair Summer Research Experience (SRE). The majority of the Scholars worked with Trinity faculty members, although three Scholars worked with external mentors at the Center for Family Relations, the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, and the University of Texas at Dallas. Scholars completed a wide variety of thought-provoking projects ranging from a study of Síclovía, San Antonio to modeling mammalian geographic ranges, and from Alzheimer’s disease to the influence of composer Antonio Cifra.

At the end of the ten weeks, each Scholar had the opportunity to present his or her research via an oral or a poster presentation at the 8th Annual Summer Undergraduate Research Conference and 29th Annual Department of Chemistry Research Symposium held at Trinity on July 24-25, 2013. McNair Scholars culminated their experience at the 2013 McNair Summer Research Banquet on July 25 at the Holt Conference Center on campus. During this event Scholars and their mentors were recognized for their accomplishments over the course of the SRE. Keynote speaker Dennis Ugolini, associate professor and chair of the department of physics and astronomy at Trinity, shared his own varied research experiences as an undergraduate at the California Institute of Technology. Professor Ugolini’s talk was chock full of entertaining stories coupled with insightful advice and was enjoyed by everyone.

BELOW: Junior Scholar Tae Sakong presents his summer research titled, “ApoE Expression in Aged Astrocytes as a Model of Alzheimer’s Disease,” which he conducted under the supervision of James Roberts, biology.

LEFT: Scholar Shacoya Atkins and her mentor, Pamela McGuire (Center for Family Relations, San Antonio), and Scholar Christian Tovar-Vargas (junior) and his mentor, Harry Wallace (psychology), were recognized at the McNair Summer Research Banquet for their accomplishments.

ABOVE: Katy Yachinich (senior), Jennifer Steele (physics and astronomy), Hongbing Lu (University of Texas at Dallas, mechanical engineering), and Megan Garcia (senior) were among those who attended the Summer Research Banquet in July.
Welcome! NEW SCHOLARS 2013-2014

Alexis Daggett (SO) biology, chemistry Montello, Wisconsin
Arnulfo Tunon (SO) neuroscience Kirby, Texas
Camry Gonzalez (SO) psychology, biology San Antonio, Texas
Franchesa Escapita (SO) psychology Haltam City, Texas
Gabriella Montemayor (JR) accounting San Antonio, Texas
Giovanna Espinoza (SO) psychology San Antonio, Texas

Ismerai Monreal (JR) political science, communication San Antonio, Texas
Jaferaly Hooda (JR) philosophy Houston, Texas
Leslie Cook (JR) biology Corpus Christi, Texas
Maria Moscosa (SO) international business San Antonio, Texas
Namchi Do (SO) computer science Memphis, Tennessee
Sonny Luna (SO) fine arts San Antonio, Texas

Honors, Awards, and Achievements

Our Scholars have been very busy with all types of academic activities. Here’s a sampling of some of their most notable accomplishments:

Jena Daggett (May 2013)
Frances Richter Swinny Outstanding Human Communication Major Award

Ambreen Hooda (senior)
“Completing the Circle: The Significance of Khadija bint Khuwaylid and Maymuna bint al-Harith in Shaping Islamic Tradition,” published in the 2013 edition of The Expositor, the Trinity journal of undergraduate prose

Kallie Pfeiffer (May 2013)
Excellence in Art - Photography Senior Award

Camilah Powell (senior)
Co-authored “CO Oxidation over a Au/TiO2 Catalyst: Pretreatment Effects, Catalyst Deactivation, and Carbonates Production,” accepted for publication in the Journal of Catalysis

Christian Tovar-Vargas (junior)
Selected for Conexión’s “20 Under 20,” which honors young Latinos doing great things for their communities
Welcome Back Meeting

The McNair Scholars Program kicked off the fall semester with its annual Welcome Back Meeting hosted by Program assistant director Teresa Morrison and her husband Tommy at their home in San Antonio. It was a full house as twelve new Scholars—eight sophomores and four juniors—joined the ranks of 16 returning Scholars. In addition, we also welcomed incoming tutorial faculty member Jennifer Steele. Introductions started things off and then it was on to an ice-breaker, getting Scholars ebbing and flowing in “tidal waves” across the living room as they responded to questions about whether or not they have met anyone famous, traveled anywhere out of country, or if they were an only child. After general announcements, guests were invited to help themselves to a buffet of home-cooked family recipes and fresh-off-the-grill burgers and dogs.

Program director Michael Soto gave the keynote address, “Why I Wish I’d Been a McNair Scholar,” describing the first instances in his academic life where he had been mentored and what that had meant to him.

The night ended with an ice-cold dessert, Program reminders, and a question and answer period. We are looking forward to a great semester. ▼
Alumni Spotlight: Where are they now?

For Domale (Dube) Keys, it’s never been a question of if she would give back, but rather how she would give back. She has been very successful in her academic and professional life and attributes much of that success to the opportunity to come to the United States with her family many years ago. In high school a close mentor advised her to apply for the Gates Millennium Scholarship, which she received, and that honor has since opened numerous doors for her, including allowing her to come to Trinity University. “I went to Trinity knowing how blessed and privileged I was to be there. I would do my best not to waste my opportunity,” Domale said.

Domale knew she would pursue postgraduate education and says she looked to the McNair Scholars Program for assistance. “Through the McNair Program, I was able to explore my research interests and make an informed decision about what area I could see myself in graduate school and beyond,” she explains. She graduated magna cum laude from Trinity in May of 2010 with a B.A. in English and a minor in art.

Domale began her graduate studies at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 2010. After graduating with her Ed.M. in 2011, she returned to San Antonio and taught 9th and 10th grade English at SAISD’s Navarro Academy for two years. She says, “I knew that if I was ever going to make changes in the field of education, I would need first-hand experience in the classroom.” This fall, she will begin a doctoral program in comparative international education at UCLA.

During all of these educational pursuits, Domale has still focused on her desire to give back. “Project AIDS Nigeria [PAN], the non-profit my husband and I founded, stems from my realization that I had to do something to give back to a people who initially gave me the chance to live in America,” she explains. “We’ve just concluded the first full year during which we have been able to reach over 1,500 students with facts about HIV and, in the process, develop solid leaders for the community through our student assistants.”

Domale’s advice to current Scholars? “Don’t worry so much if you are not sure what you want to do. Prepare for and apply to the programs that interest you now and go from there. Chances are, when it comes to choosing between schools and programs, you’ll know by then what feels right to you.” This approach has certainly worked well for Domale, and we wish her continued success.

Join us in congratulating McNair alum David Munson on the successful completion of his master of arts degree from Syracuse University! David graduated from Syracuse’s communication and rhetorical studies program this spring with his master’s thesis, “An Invitational Approach to Ancient Chinese Rhetorical Traditions,” which will be presented at the World and Cultures of the East conference in Krakow, Poland. During his studies at Syracuse, David also had the opportunity to present his paper, “Language and Dissensus: A Linguistic Paradox in Contemporary Democracy,” at the National Communication Association’s 98th annual conference. He also served as a research assistant, teaching assistant, and tutor, earning his Certificate of Undergraduate Teaching from Syracuse University, University-Future Professional Professorate. David is starting a Ph.D. program in rhetoric and public affairs at Texas A&M University this fall, where he currently holds a position as a teaching assistant.

David began participating in the McNair Scholars Program at Trinity in January of 2010. At Trinity, he was a member of Lambda Pi Eta national speech honor society and also served as a peer mentor for public speaking courses.

Asked for advice for current Scholars, David responds, “Focus on your own interests and have confidence in what you are studying. Spend less time worrying and more time focusing on what makes you happy.” We know David will continue to be successful at A&M and look forward to hearing more great things from him in the future.
We would like to welcome Jennifer Steele, associate professor in the department of physics and astronomy, to the McNair Scholars Program. Professor Steele will be joining us as the new tutorial faculty member and will be working with this year’s sophomore class. According to professor Steele, she “has somehow lived most of her life in Texas.” After being born in Ohio, her family moved to Texas and she (happily) can’t seem to escape. She fell in love with physics at McCullough High School north of Houston, then continued her studies at Rice University. There she earned her B.A. in applied physics in 1994 and went on to obtain her Ph.D. in applied physics in 2004. Between her undergraduate and graduate degrees she taught science at Westbury High School in Houston for two years. Her research in graduate school was in the area of nano-technology, where she was able to apply her physics background in a very exciting, interdisciplinary field. Steele joined the Trinity faculty in August 2005 and currently studies the optical properties of nano-structured metals.

Her hobbies include ultimate Frisbee, knitting, and swing dancing. She is very excited to help a new group of McNair Scholars get the most out of their Trinity education and prepare them for their adventures after graduation. We are very grateful to have her aboard and look forward to an amazing year.

Cultural Event: Spamalot

Jennifer Steele, tutorial faculty for the sophomore class, kicked off the fall semester right with our first cultural event. On Saturday, August 31, she led a group of Scholars to the Woodlawn Theatre to enjoy Spamalot, a musical comedy based on the 1975 film Monty Python and the Holy Grail. The event provided a great opportunity to learn more about British comedy and Broadway shows, as well as build camaraderie among the Scholars. After the show, professor Steele graciously invited everyone back to her house to enjoy frozen treats from El Paraiso, the original paleta company in San Antonio. After cooling off with ice cream bars flavored with strawberry, mango, horchata, cookies and cream, tamarind, and more, our night was complete. Everyone had a wonderful time, and we look forward to more fun at future cultural events.
Stephanie Croatt, shown here at the Hampton Roads Naval Museum collecting data on the portrayal of the US Navy in photo postcards dating between 1913 and 1945, recently joined with other McNair graduates to mentor current Scholars via Skype. For the complete story, see page 3.