McNair Scholars, Tutorial Faculty, and staff gathered for the annual End of Semester Meeting, December 5, 2013. Program director Dr. Michael Soto hosted the event in his family home and provided a tamale buffet. Over dinner, information about summer research, MLK events, spring registration, and fall course evaluations was presented and discussed. A white elephant gift exchange followed, during which the homemade artisan soap made from Daggett goats soon became the most “stolen” gift. Group photos rounded out the night.

Normally in this space I celebrate the successes of our Scholars and the growing number of McNair alumni. For this issue, though, it’s fitting that I celebrate the two persons who make up the backbone of the McNair Scholars Program staff.

Last fall saw Teresa Morrison achieve two important milestones. First, she was promoted from assistant director to associate director after four years of outstanding work on behalf of the Program and its Scholars. The time will come soon when I leave behind my role as director, and thanks to Teresa’s intelligence and professionalism I will do so knowing that the ship continues to steer a smooth course. Second—and she would no doubt say more important—Teresa became the mother of the truly adorable Tristan. Although all of us were glad that mother and daughter spent quality newborn time together, we breathed a small sigh of relief when Teresa returned from family leave to start off the new semester.

Our program specialist, Beckie Ugolini, can boast of multiple personalities, but in a truly good way. Using the pen name R. L. Ugolini, she writes compelling fiction that takes shape unpredictably because of her playful handling of genre expectations (from sci-fi noir to rustic fantasy). Her narrators vary just as widely and their idiosyncratic voices are as entertaining as they are mysterious. You can find her work at online publications such as summersetreview.org and undergroundvoices.com and her short story, “The Furious Passion of Jolene Kartwright,” can be found in the recently published collection Demonic Visions: 50 Horror Tales (2014).

I can boast about our Scholars’ many successes because Teresa and Beckie make the successes possible.

Michael Soto
of food, art, and cheer at the monthly event. Although a large-scale construction project made the night dustier and less pedestrian friendly than expected, the group enjoyed wood-fired pizza and other savory treats at Stella Public House, then visited a number of galleries at and near the Blue Star Arts Complex. Because the First Friday Art Walk coincided with the traditional Mexican holiday Día de los Muertos, altars commemorating the dearly departed with calaveras (sugar skulls), marigolds, and other ofrendas (offerings) figured prominently.

First Friday is just one among hundreds of reasons why San Antonio enriches the Trinity experience beyond measure.

**Unique Cultural Experiences**

**Fun First Friday Frolic**

The King William Historic District just south of downtown acquired its name because most of its original inhabitants were German immigrants who settled the area during the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm (King William), German emperor and king of Prussia. Beginning in the 1980s, the neighborhood, then well over a century old, saw an influx of artists and art galleries; for almost as long, the King William has hosted a circus-like mix of gallery openings, music, food, and public spectacle known as the First Friday Art Walk.

On November 1, 2013, professors Michael Soto and Jennifer Steele joined a hearty group of Scholars for an evening

**Swan Song**

Gabriella Montemayor, junior, was the lucky winner of two tickets to a performance by the San Antonio Symphony. Gabby chose to attend Tchaikovsky’s ballet, *Swan Lake*, on April 11, 2014, at the historic Majestic Theater. She shared the experience with her little sister, who has recently taken up the violin. Both Gabby and her sister were thrilled to attend the classic performance and enjoyed their time together.

**Don’t Cry For Me Argentina**

On April 30, 2014, Dr. Jennifer Steele and Dr. Jack Leifer, tutorial faculty, took a group of Scholars back to the beautiful Majestic Theater to experience Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice’s *Evita*, which tells the rags-to-riches rise of the First Lady of Argentina, who won the love of her countrymen after marrying military leader-turned-president Juan Peron. Set in Buenos Aires between 1934-1952, the musical follows Eva Duarte Peron on her journey from fatherless child to ambitious actress to the most powerful woman in Latin America—and, eventually, to a saint-like figure after her death from cancer at age 33. In addition to seeing the performance, the group participated in a “talk back,” going backstage afterward to meet some of the cast members and join in a question and answer session about the show, production, planning, and more. It was an amazing experience, and the Scholars really enjoyed it.
Graduate School Information

Scholars had amazing opportunities to learn more about graduate school from several guest speakers.

Harvard Yard

Dr. Sheila Thomas, Assistant Dean for Diversity and Minority Affairs at the Harvard University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS), made a special visit to campus on October 3, 2013 to host an informational session for interested McNair Scholars. Dean Thomas and third-year Harvard Ph.D. candidate in the virology program, Kellie Jurado, fielded questions and discussed topics relating to applying to graduate school, financial aid, housing, summer research programs, the Cambridge/Boston area, and more. Several Scholars attended the event, and pamphlets were made available for those who were unable to attend.

Lessons From the Other Side

Scholars had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Tonya Sanders, assistant professor in the department of City and Regional Planning at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland, on March 19, 2014. Dr. Sanders was a McNair Scholar at Truman State University, where Trinity McNair Associate Director Teresa Morrison cut her TRiO teeth. Dr. Sanders is a first-generation college student and earned a B.A. in psychology from Truman, an M.A. in community psychology and social change from Penn State, and a Ph.D. in urban planning and policy from the University of Illinois at Chicago. While in San Antonio for the annual Urban Affairs Association conference, she graciously agreed to meet with Trinity McNair Scholars to share her experiences as a graduate student, research assistant, faculty member, and working professional in her field. She offered sound advice about following your passion, learning about the political climate at your graduate institution, being a self-advocate, and much more. Her talk was very well-received and extremely useful to those in attendance.

Visits to Graduate Institutions

Our Scholars have explored graduate schools all over the country:

Megan Garcia
Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Champaign, Illinois
February 19-22, 2014

Vanessa Ortiz
UNTHSC School of Public Health
Fort Worth, Texas
March 12-14, 2014

Camilah Powell
Rice University
Houston, Texas
March 27-29, 2014

Victor Rodgriguez
Columbia University
Mailman School of Public Health
New York, N.Y.
March 11-12, 2014

McNair Scholars welcomed the chance to learn more about graduate opportunities at Harvard. Pictured in the front row are Kellie Jurado, Gabriella Montemayor (junior), and Ambreen Hooda (senior) and in the back row, Dr. Sheila Thomas, Ismerai Monreal (junior), and Shalee Wallace (junior).
experience and she gave presentations to the McNair Program and the FGUS-Allies group about the benefits and challenges of studying abroad and how the Gilman Scholarship can help fund the study abroad experience.

British Invasion

Junior Scholar Ismerai Monreal spent spring 2014 studying abroad at St. Mary’s University in Twickenham, England. Situated in the London Borough of Richmond, the school offers its students easy access to the international melting pot of a larger city while maintaining the quintessential English traditions that drive the country’s own heritage and culture. Ismerai has been able to take in a number of historic sites in England, including the Tower Bridge and Abbey Road Crossing (London), Big Ben (Westminster), Stonehenge (Wiltshire), Oxford University, and the White Cliffs of Dover. She also visited Paris, Rome, Venice, and Florence. “I have made lifelong friends from across the pond, and I have made beautiful memories that will be etched in my mind...

West Meets East

Receiving the very prestigious Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship allowed junior Anthia Liu to spend the fall semester with the Syracuse University Abroad Hong Kong program. The Gilman Scholarship, sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, awards grants to undergraduate students to pursue academic studies and internships abroad. While in Hong Kong, Anthia took courses for her international business concentration and helped mentor college students by doing weekly activities to improve their English skills. Aside from all of the wonderful experiences Hong Kong had to offer, Anthia toured other cities in China as well, including Beijing (where she visited the Forbidden City, the Great Wall of China, Tiananmen Square, and the Temple of Heaven), Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Macau. She also spent time in Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam. During her travels, Anthia had the opportunity to see several family members for the first time. “The whole experience in Asia was absolutely wonderful! It was enriching, challenging, character building, and I created some amazing memories of my time abroad,” Anthia shared.

As part of the requirements for the grant, Anthia created a video about her

World Travelers

Three of our current Scholars have had the opportunity to study abroad this year, taking them, literally, all over the world. What an amazing experience for each of them!

While in London, Ismerai Monreal visited Platform 9 3/4, a tribute to the impact of Harry Potter on English culture.
South American Adventure

A summer internship grant from the executive committee of the Mexico, the Americas, and Spain (MAS) Program helped Valerie Martinez fulfill her dream of traveling to Argentina. Through IES Abroad, a non-profit study abroad organization that administers study abroad programs for U.S. college-aged students, Valerie spent the fall 2013 semester in the capital of Buenos Aires. In addition to taking classes in Latin American arts, literature, and politics, she was able to really experience the Argentine culture with visits to San Telmo Barrio (the oldest neighborhood in Buenos Aires), the Museo de Arte Hispanoamericano Isaac Fernandez Blanco, and Recoleta Cemetery (where Eva Perón is buried), to name a few. She also found it interesting to compare Argentine food to the traditional Mexican and TexMex fare in San Antonio. While in Argentina, she was able to make her own empanadas, which were unexpectedly filled with carne instead of sweet potato and/or caramel. She also sampled local favorites, alfajores, a sweet cookie with a dulce de leche filling and covered in chocolate, and mate, a bitter drink that Argentines love. “Not going to lie—I think I may be obsessed with it too,” Valerie added.
On February 16-17, 2014, Dr. Jack Leifer, tutorial faculty, and Teresa Morrison, associate director, led 7 junior Scholars on a group graduate school visit to Texas A&M University (TAMU) in College Station. We were greeted with a resounding “Howdy!” by staff from the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies, who set up an amazing day filled with a presentation on applying to graduate school, information on graduate studies at TAMU, a campus tour, a faculty panel, individual meetings with professors and current grad students, a delicious lunch, and more. All the Scholars left with a goodie bag full of TAMU swag, and we even got to stop for some scrumptious Black’s Barbecue in Lockhart on the way home!

Our Scholars were pleasantly surprised by how much they enjoyed the trip and what TAMU had to offer. Here’s what they had to say:

“They (TAMU) are #2 nationally for their marketing program, which I can’t ignore! I was able to make a lot of connections today thanks to McNair! So glad I was exposed to a school I had never even thought about before.”

**Gabriella Montemayor**

“I was pleasantly surprised when I found out that the department is actually pretty sizable for humanities. The faculty was diverse enough to cover nearly every school of thought in philosophy.”

**Jaferaly Hoooda**

“Visiting a graduate school for the first was quite the rewarding experience. Interacting with these professors made me feel confident about the work I have been doing and it makes me even more excited about applying.”

**Christian Tovar-Vargas**

“Our recent visit to TAMU provided an excellent opportunity to evaluate what I was looking for in a graduate program. I had the opportunity to not only tour research labs and observe the academic aspect of grad school, but also the campus culture that is unique to TAMU.”

**Tae-Hyun Sakong**

“I got a glimpse of what life could be like at a large public university compared to our small private liberal arts campus at Trinity. I was also impressed by their school spirit and friendliness. Greeting everyone with ‘Howdy!’ was one of the highlights of my trip with the McNair Scholars Program.”

**Anthia Liu**

“The opportunity to visit Texas A&M was truly exciting because it made the idea of attending graduate school more concrete. It made me want to learn about more graduate schools and excited about the future.”

**Leslie Cook**

“I liked that even though the campus was so vast that all of its members felt a sense of community. Our tour guides knew everyone and emphasized the unity and friendship among its students.”

**Rosa Olivares**
McNair alumna Stephanie Croatt has accepted her dream job as curator with Battleship Texas. “I owe the McNair staff a huge debt of gratitude for this accomplishment. I am unsure whether I would have made it to this point on my own, but I do know for certain that the mentoring and support the McNair Scholars Program extended me were absolutely instrumental in my success to date. I acquired a ton of professional and academic ‘know how’ from the Program staff that helped me get into ‘the’ graduate school, and (eventually) bag ‘the’ job.”

Battleship Texas is run by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. In her new capacity, Stephanie will be in charge of education and collections management. She will oversee interpretation (tours and programs for the public), exhibits (rotating and permanent), and object cataloging, storage, and display. Stephanie and her staff just finished the centennial celebration last week, and Stephanie says, “The job is excellent so far!”

Stephanie graduated from Trinity with a B.A. in biology in 2011. In May 2013, she was awarded an M.A. in maritime studies from East Carolina University.

Victoria Gbenjo

One of McNair alumna Victoria Gbenjo’s many notable qualities is her sincere drive to succeed. She is tremendously ambitious, and her intellectual curiosity, passion for scientific knowledge, commitment to serving others, and strong work ethic have certainly helped her in her pursuit of graduate studies.

Victoria’s initial plan was to attend podiatry school after graduating from Trinity in May 2013 with a B.A. in biology. “I particularly had my eyes on a school that offered a D.P.M./M.P.H program where I could pursue both degrees at once,” Victoria said. Unfortunately, however, she did not get into any of the schools she applied to and was encouraged to take time and strengthen her application. So she did just that. Last summer she was awarded the Fulbright-Hayes Scholarship to participate in an intensive Yoruba language study in Nigeria, as she is interested in global health, specifically among Yoruba people. When she got back to the states, she took more science courses to improve her GPA, in addition to working and volunteering. Victoria shared, “I decided to pursue the M.P.H. I had my heart set on, even if it (initially) would be without a D.P.M. I applied and have been accepted into NYU, Notre Dame, UT School of Public Health, and Emory!” Victoria strongly feels her experience and the M.P.H. degree, which she will begin at UTSPH in the fall, will further strengthen her application for when she reapplies to podiatry school.

Victoria’s path to graduate school was unique; her success story is one of hope and encouragement and not giving up on your dreams. “Things did not go how I originally intended, but I think that’s how God wanted it.”

McNair Scholars Program

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Associate Director: Teresa Morrison, M.A.E.
Program Assistant: Beckie Ugolini, B.S.
McNair Tutorial Faculty:
  Rocio Delgado, Ph.D. (multicultural special education)
  Jack Leifer, Ph.D. (engineering science)
  Jennifer Steele, Ph.D. (physics)

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McNair Scholars Program

Notable Honors, Awards, and Achievements

Terrin Blackmon, Ambreen Hooda, Victor Rodriguez, and Christian Tovar-Vargas were nominated for and presented at the 14th edition of the Showcase of Student Academic Talent at Trinity. Alexis Daggett was awarded the Ina Beth McGavock Scholarship through the chemistry department at Trinity. Ambreen Hooda earned the English Honor Award from the department of English. Anthia Liu was inducted into Beta Sigma Gamma International Business Honor Society. She was also selected to participate in Trinity’s faculty-led Shanghai Program for summer 2014. Christian Tovar-Vargas co-founded and is the president of Trinity’s Latin Dance Society. Shalee Wallace secured a physical therapy shadowing opportunity with Promotions PT in San Antonio.