McNair Scholars Program
Faculty Mentor Guide

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Preface

Thank you for agreeing to serve as Mentors in the Ronald E. McNair Program. In this short guide we have attempted to provide background on the McNair Program, to list some characteristics of our students, and to discuss some of the responsibilities of the McNair Mentors. We look forward to working with you in the project of helping our students in their development as Scholars.

The Program

Office Staff:

Dr. Pamela Nevar, Program Director   nevarp@cwu.edu   (509) 963-2809
Dr. Lucinda Carnell, Faculty Coordinator   carnelll@cwu.edu   (509) 963-2880

Program Goal:

The goal of the program is to encourage and assist Scholars to enter doctoral studies by providing the opportunity for seminars regarding entrance into graduate school, a research fellowship that exposes them to graduate-level expectations, and a close working relationship with a faculty Mentor. The intent of the federal legislation that authorizes this program is to promote diversity in academia. The Ronald E. McNair Program is funded under the U.S. Department of Education. The CWU Program is one of 178 across the country at four-year institutions of higher education.

Applying and getting into graduate school is an extremely competitive and time-consuming process for any undergraduate student. The Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program provides training and financial support for Scholars to complete their undergraduate degrees and enter a graduate degree program. Two thirds of our funding is earmarked for low-income, first generation college students regardless of ethnic background, and one third is geared toward minority students regardless of his or her income or parents' education. Often our Scholars meet all criteria.

The Mentors

Specific Requirements of the Mentor

These requirements are modeled on the McNair Research Mentor Agreement. The Teaching Mentor requirements are slightly different as they pertain to teaching experience rather than research experience.

   📖 Attend a **general orientation** meeting with McNair Staff for each year in which you have a new scholar.

   📖 If human or animal subjects are to be used, help scholar complete a **human subjects protocol** or an **animal subjects protocol** as early as possible

   📖 Meet with the Scholar as soon as possible in his/her 1st year of the Program to discuss a **research paper topic**, and to direct the Scholar to the appropriate literature. The Scholar should complete an **annotated bibliography** of the literature before Winter Quarter.

📖 Work with the Faculty Coordinator during the proposal phase of the research project. **Help the Scholar to understand the need for multiple input and criticism.**

📖 **Meet with the Scholar regularly** during the academic year to discuss academic progress toward the undergraduate degree and progress toward entering graduate school. **There will be monthly contact logs to submit due to federal documentation requirements.**

📖 Assist the Scholar in **identifying appropriate graduate programs**.

📖 During the **summer**, serve as a Mentor to the Scholar during the Research Fellowship, preferably meeting with the Scholar on a weekly basis.

📖 During the summer research fellowship, **sign and assess** the Scholar's **Time and Effort Sheet** every two weeks, (the Scholar is responsible for submitting the timesheet to the McNair Office).

📖 When data collection is complete, meet with the Scholar to outline the process of the **final write-up**.

📖 Review and, when satisfactory, approve the **Scholar's research paper** by signing the front cover. **Final papers are due by August 27th unless otherwise arranged.**

📖 Provide guidance to the Scholar in **preparing a presentation** of the research at SOURCE, **and** at a professional meeting or a national undergraduate conference, including a McNair Conference.

📖 Provide guidance to the Scholar in preparing the **research paper** for publication in a journal and/or presentation at a conference.

📖 **Report any concerns** to either the Director or Faculty Coordinator of the McNair Scholars Program. Regularly update McNair staff on your scholar's status.

Research Mentors are strongly encouraged to:

📖 **Attend a professional conference with Scholars** (helping them to "network" with other researchers in their discipline).

📖 Participate with the Scholar in the **McNair Spring Graduation Banquet** during the Scholar's Senior year

In addition to the general expectations, very experienced CWU McNair Mentors have this advice to add:

1. Understand where your Scholars are in the McNair Scholars Program Schedule and encourage and facilitate meeting the deadlines.

2. Help your Scholars to understand the complementary roles that the McNair staff (especially the Faculty Coordinator), the Scholar, and you play – and how to handle multiple sources of constructive criticism.

3. Provide an overview of the planned project that is clear and workable, with explicit timelines.

4. Emphasize the importance of re-writing.

5. Model and expect quality scholarship and professionalism.

6. Meet with the Scholars regularly and "pick their brains" for their level of understanding.

What are The McNair Program's definitions and expectations of Faculty Mentors?

Mentors are an essential part of The McNair Program at Central Washington University. The program recognizes two categories of Mentors: **Research Mentors** and **Teaching Mentors**. Research Mentors are provided with stipends to help support their mentees on their research and graduate school applications. Teaching mentorships are an optional feature of the McNair program.

Research Mentors engage Scholars in the process of conducting undergraduate research from the literature review or annotated bibliography in the fall, the proposal in the winter, research and data-collection in the summer, then to actually producing a research paper. The paper is then groomed for presentation in some format (e.g., a poster, a panel discussion, or a talk) at a professional conference and SOURCE. The Research Mentors are eligible for up to a $575 stipend for the academic year and $350 for the summer research fellowship. See Mentor Funding below for more information.

Teaching Mentors are shadowed by the Scholar in a particular class to learn many of the aspects of university-level teaching. These may include (but are not limited to) lecture or lab preparation, exam preparation, marking, office hours, and other faculty responsibilities (e.g., faculty meetings). This mentorship will focus on one unit of a course in which the Scholar received a B or better. The unit should span two to four weeks during the Scholar's second year in the program. **At this time, there are no account funds for Teaching Mentors.** Scholars interested in a teaching mentorship are encouraged to either register as a teaching assistant or arrange an independent study with a teaching mentor during which the scholar will be introduced to pedagogical issues in the field and will have the opportunity to practice some T.A. duties.

The explicit goal of the mentoring process is to impart research and teaching skills that Scholars will need to excel in graduate school, but implicitly, the mentoring process also provides Scholars with a model for getting into graduate school, and how to succeed once there.

The Mentor can be a critical bridge between the Scholar and graduate education by guiding the Scholar in the process of **selecting a graduate program** and school. Even a Mentor's telephone call to a colleague at a graduate program to assist a Scholar in visiting a school can open up a new opportunity. Hopefully, the relationship established between Scholar and Mentor will flourish throughout the Scholar's undergraduate career and contact will continue, perhaps even through the doctorate.

Mentor Funding

This year, Research Mentors may receive up to $925 in research and travel expenses ($350 for summer and $575 for the academic year). Our strong preference is that this money be used to

finance Mentor travel to **accompany** a Scholar to a professional conference. When the scholars must travel for a conference, the mentor can get an advance for the scholar even if they are not traveling with the scholar. Monies can also be used for materials related to the McNair research (e.g., equipment, books, photocopying), for production of presentations such as posters, or for general Scholar travel to visit graduate schools. Contact the McNair office (x2869) with order information (using the Mentor Purchase Request form on our website) and we will place the order for you.

Purchasing items for the scholar research projects: Most departments take care of the purchases and utilize charge/credits, initiated by the Department Secretary and sent to the McNair Office. HSRC and Animal Subject approvals must be included with the charge/credit before the Grants Office can approve the fund transfer.

Two things to remember:

1. All purchases must be pre-approved by the Director and **remember that our program works on a federal fiscal year (October-September).**

2. Timeline of Funds Availability:
   Summer: $870

Some priorities for the mentoring relationship

- ❖ To respect Scholars as persons

- ❖ To encourage sharing of ideas, experiences, and ethics

- ❖ To guide students toward professional development by allowing them to define their research and solve their own problems, and by urging them to attend conferences and to publish

- ❖ To provide opportunities for students and faculty to get to know one another as persons and as professionals

- ❖ To create intellectual challenges and to make standards clear through open, frequent, and consistent communication

Building the Mentoring Relationship: Some Practical Suggestions for Mentors

- 📖 Set a **regular meeting time** and **clarify expectations** regarding your schedule and how much time and guidance you are prepared to offer.

- 📖 **Monitor** your Scholars' educational progress. (As faculty, you can access transcripts and credit evaluations that can be immensely helpful to the student who is seriously working toward the goal of a graduate degree.)

- 📖 **Be aware of resources for academic referrals**, and know how and when to make them. Try to determine causes for deficits in academic performance and direct the student to an

appropriate support service. If possible, have him/her contact the referral service in your presence.

  📖 **Critique** your Scholars' academic resumes/vitas.

  📖 **Introduce your Scholars** to other faculty members and graduate students in the department. Let them know that your Scholars are interested in doctoral study.

  📖 **Suggest readings** you think will be of interest to your Scholars.

  📖 Talk about graduate school and research experiences.

  📖 Contact potential graduate schools and former colleagues and tell them about your Scholars. **Make formal or informal recommendations for the students** to faculty at other institutions.

  📖 **Assist with graduate school applications**. Help your Scholars define and articulate goals. Read and proofread their personal goal statements.

  📖 Involve your Scholars in research and dissemination of results through publication and presentation.

  📖 Invite your Scholars to social events or after-hours get-togethers.

Issues and challenges mentoring may present

- How close can the mentoring relationship become before the Mentor loses the ability to make objective evaluations of the Scholar's work or before the Scholar confuses the Mentor's role as more of a friend than an academic mentor?

- How can problems in the research project be resolved without damaging the Mentor/Scholar relationship?

- How involved should a Mentor become in a Scholar's personal life?

- How involved should a Mentor become in a Scholar's research project?

- How can Mentors be recognized in their departments and in the university?

- How can I mentor a student who doesn't meet all my expectations?

Such problems are fairly common occurrences. Should you experience any of these or other challenges, please do not hesitate to contact either the Director or Faculty Coordinator. We will be happy to discuss these issues with you or to put you in touch with another mentor who has dealt with similar issues.

Profile of First-generation students

- First-generation students are more likely to be **older**, have lower incomes, be married, and **have dependents** than their non-first-generation peers.
- First-generation students are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education **part-time**, and to attend public 2-year institutions; private, for-profit institutions; and other less-than-4-year institutions than their non-first-generation counterparts.
- First-generation students are equally as likely to be taking remedial classes as non-first-generation students when they began their postsecondary education. However, there are differences by sector on this measure. At private, not-for-profit 4-year institutions, first-generation students were more likely to be taking remedial courses than their counterparts whose parents had more than a high school education. At the same time, the proportions of first-generation and non-first-generation students at public 4-year and public 2-year institutions taking remedial coursework did not differ significantly.
- First-generation students are **more likely than non-first-generation students to say that being very well off financially** and providing their children with better opportunities than they had were **very important to them personally**.
- First-generation students are also more likely to say that obtaining the amount of financial aid they needed, being able to complete coursework more quickly, being able to live at home, and being able to work while attending the school were very important influences in their decision to attend their particular postsecondary institution.
- First-generation students **persisted in postsecondary education and attained credentials at lower rates** than their non-first-generation counterparts. This finding held for students at 4-year institutions and public 2-year institutions.
- **Participating in a Mentor relationship mitigates many of these factors.**

Scholars
Scholars are recruited in various ways. Information is disseminated to campus departments, to individual classes, to faculty functions, to the campus radio station, and via email, to name only a few. Qualified students then apply on a rolling basis. The Advisory Board interviews the applicants. The Advisory Board and the McNair staff select the new cohort after these interviews.

Qualifications for Scholar Selection:
> Scholars may be selected from **one of two federally-legislated groups:**

1. *First-generation, low-income students.*
   No less than two-thirds of the Scholars must come from this group. (First generation is defined as students whose parents or guardians have not obtained a four-year undergraduate degree and low-income is defined by annual levels set by the U.S. Department of Education.)
2. *Minorities underrepresented in doctoral programs.*
   No more than one-third of the Scholars will qualify for the program based on their status as ethnic minority students underrepresented in doctoral studies.

Criteria for Scholar Selection:
> The U.S. Department of Education sets the parameters for selection of McNair Scholars. All candidates must meet the following criteria:

1. Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident
2. Have a major G.P.A. of 3.1 or higher and cumulative G.P.A. of 2.9
3. Have a commitment to obtain a doctoral degree (Ph.D.). The program does not support students who desire a professional degree (J.D., M.D., etc.), unless it is part of a Ph.D. joint-degree program.
4. Have completed 90 credits *before the summer research fellowship* and not graduate until after completion of the final write-up of their McNair research project. (A student may be selected as a Scholar and participate in activities/seminars etc. with fewer than 90 credits)

How does The McNair Program support Scholars?

The McNair Program works with Scholars in cohort groups. These cohorts can vary in size, but are usually between 12-20 students. Each year the federal grant allots sufficient funds to sponsor Scholars in an **undergraduate research project**. These funds provide training, experience, and living stipends for the Scholars.

The McNair Staff works with Scholars by providing them with general research methodology training, portfolio development, GRE preparation, financial assistance for travel to visit graduate schools and to attend conferences, and other resources. These benefits are available from the time Scholars are juniors until they graduate from an undergraduate institution. We are then responsible for tracking these Scholars until they obtain a doctoral degree. Annually renewed federal funding depends upon the number of Scholars enrolled in doctoral programs, and other objectives stated in the grant. Under the present grant at CWU, The McNair Program is authorized until the year 2012, with renewed funding subject to winning a new grant competition.

If Scholars enter the McNair Program in the fall, they are guided through an Individualized Action Plan (IAP) and how to find an appropriate mentor in McNair 301. During MCNA 395, taken the winter quarter before the summer research fellowship, scholars compose their research proposal. During the summer, scholars enroll in independent study credits while they complete their research. Students will also take the McNair Seminars (MCNA 302 & 303) in the spring of their first year and the fall of their second year. The first (302) is designed to introduce students to the process of selecting graduate school programs, the kind of commitment graduate study entails and how to discern resources for success at their chosen graduate institution. The second (303) is geared toward finalizing their grad school applications.

Scholars' funding for travel and research is contingent upon their successful completion of the courses.

Getting Your Scholar Into Graduate School

School Choice
Several factors are involved in helping Scholars to choose potential graduate schools. The McNair Scholars Program can provide arrangements for Scholars to visit schools, but Mentors should help with the decision of which schools to visit and to apply to. Here are some points to consider when helping Scholars make these decisions:

1. What type of atmosphere will be most conducive to your Scholar's success: a small or a large school; a rural or urban school; a school close by or far away?

2. Should your Scholar attempt a master's degree at a smaller institution before going on to their doctoral studies?

3. Do you have colleagues at institutions with whom you would like your Scholar to work?

5. Do you know particular departments that are working on research similar to your Scholar's?

6. What types of funding are available?

Characteristics of Successful Graduate Students
Descutner and Thelen (1989) asked 79 faculty members from 9 graduate programs to rate (6 point scale) the characteristics of successful graduate students. Here are some of the characteristics and their average ratings listed in decreasing order of importance (most important at the top):

Working hard	**5.60**
Getting along with other people	**5.17**
Writing ability	**4.83**
Research skills/experience	**4.74**
Handling stress	**4.72**
Discipline	**4.64**
Good grades	**4.61**
High intelligence	**4.53**
Empathy	**4.48**
Mentor relationship	**4.39**
Creativity	**3.69**

Herbstrith, Mauer, & Appleby (1990) did a similar study with 143 graduate programs and found very similar results.

Motivated and hardworking
Scholarly ability
Research skills
Emotional stability
Writing skills
Speaking skills
Teaching potential
Works well with others

These are the characteristics you want to instill in your Scholars. As you know, a 9-5 day and a 9-5 work ethic will not cut it in graduate school. We need to emphasize that fact.

Writing Letters of Recommendation

As a Mentor, you will be asked to write letters of recommendation for your Scholars. Surveys of graduate school faculty reveal that what these individuals want in a letter is perhaps counterintuitive. Many letters of recommendation contain information about the student's

relative intellectual ability, their class performance, and their potential for success. However, according to Drew Appleby, graduate programs want to hear about the **personal characteristics of the applicant first**, then about the **applicants acquired skills**, and that they are **less interested in hearing about intellectual abilities and grades**. This makes sense given that the graduate programs already have access to measures of intellectual ability. In addition to being useful tools in providing guidance to graduate students, the previous lists of characteristics of graduate school students may be helpful as well in constructing letters of recommendation.

Some Final Thoughts and Guidelines for Mentoring

Mentoring is an evolving relationship that may one day change from Mentor/Scholar to colleague/colleague. Personality, ethnicity, gender, knowledge, and many other factors affect this relationship. There are no standard rules about how mentoring is established or flourishes. The following quote, however, suggests some characteristics of Mentors that can be helpful to Scholars:

"Mentors are:
    advisors, people with career experience willing to share their knowledge;
    supporters, people who give emotional and moral encouragement;
    tutors, people who give specific feedback on one's performance;
    masters, in the sense of employers to whom one is apprenticed;
    sponsors, sources of information about and aid in obtaining opportunities;
    models, of identity, of the kind of person one should be to be an academic."

(Zelditch, 1990)

Please read over the Scholar manual. The section on the Scholars' expectations of the mentoring process is particularly worthwhile. We have discussed these with your Scholars.