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For Immediate Release

GSU Awarded McNair Grant

University Park, July 24, 2003 — They may not know it yet, but Governors State University college students just got a serious boost to their post-graduate futures—nearly one million dollars in grant money from the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement program.

The McNair program is one of several federal TRIO programs. It is specifically designed to prepare disadvantaged students who have strong academic potential for doctoral studies. Governors State is one of only four new institutions in the nation to be awarded McNair funding.

"McNair grants are extremely hard to get," said GSU Professor Kelly McCarthy, who co-wrote the application that secured the grant for the university. "The competition is fierce."

According to McCarthy, the competition grows from the intense demand for students who have been through McNair programs. Those students can usually expect to be sought out by doctoral programs throughout the country. "McNair students are so well-prepared that institutions are confident that they'll succeed at the doctorate level of study," McCarthy said.

McNair grant money will make a range of services available to eligible GSU students including counseling and assistance in securing financial aid and admission to doctoral programs. Since McNair scholars will be from groups who are low income, first generation college students, or underrepresented in graduate education, the counseling services will be particularly beneficial.

"Graduate education will often be outside the range of experience these students have," said Dr. Becky Nugent, who co-wrote the GSU grant application. "But through the McNair program, we'll be able to show them how they can progress into doctoral studies and succeed there."

Nugent said another key component to the program will be a mentoring relationship between McNair scholars and GSU faculty. "Our McNair scholars will be immersed in the academic world. They'll go to academic conferences around the country with their faculty mentors, actively do research, and even present at conferences. By the time they complete the program, the idea and reality of doctoral study will be very familiar to them."

The grant as written by Nugent and McCarthy places particular emphasis on the sciences, and 60 percent of the McNair students will be from the university's science and health profession programs. The grant will fund the support of approximately 10 McNair scholars for every year of the grant period, which lasts for four years. The program goes into effect at Governors State on October 1 and becomes the third federal TRIO program housed in the university.

The Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement program is named for the Challenger shuttle astronaut who was killed in the 1986 tragedy that took the lives of Challenger's crew. McNair earned his Ph.D. in physics at MIT. He was one of the first three African Americans selected for astronaut training and the second African American in space.

For more information, contact Dr. Becky Nugent at 708-235-2105 or Professor Kelly McCarthy at 708-235-3966.