

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY  
McNAIR SCHOLARS  
PROGRAM  
RESEARCH JOURNAL

## \* San José State University and McNair

The Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program was established by Congress in 1986 after the tragic explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger that killed seven crew members, including Dr. McNair. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the program provides institutions with grants to develop and implement successful programs that recruit promising and aspiring low-income and first-generation students and those from backgrounds underrepresented at the doctoral level and prepares them for the rigors of graduate level work. Currently, the program operates at 151 institutions across the country serving over 5000 scholars each year.

Since the McNair Scholars Program's inception at SJSU in 1996, McNair has successfully recruited over 300 low-income and first-generation students and individuals who are underrepresented at the doctoral level. Of those who have completed the program, 100% have earned their bachelor's degree, far exceeding the 16% - 20% for this population nationwide. Eighty percent of our SJSU graduates have finished or are pursuing a graduate school degree, and 100% of our students who are in graduate school are continuously enrolled. This year, 18% of our SJSU alumni who went off to graduate school attained their Ph.D.'s. SJSU has McNair alumni teaching or studying at universities across the United States, as well as in Germany, Columbia, Kenya, Australia, Turkey, and Morocco. We are extremely proud of our students and our program's successes.

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The information and policies included in this journal were current when printed but are subject to change without notice. Additional and more current information may be found on the World Wide Web at <http://www.sjsu.edu>.

This journal can also be accessed at <http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/mcnair/>.

A special thanks to Associate Vice President for Student Transition and Retention Services Division of Student Affairs, Dr. Gregory Wolcott. Thank you for supporting our program and for sponsoring the McNair Scholars Journal at San José State University.

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The San José State University McNair Scholars Program is pleased to present the sixteenth SJSU McNair Scholars Research Journal. This journal represents the diverse and practical research experiences of the McNair Scholars during the 2019-2020 academic year.

I would like to congratulate the scholars for their hard work, dedication, and accomplishments, especially during this COVID-19 spring semester which was very difficult and took us all by surprise. I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to the faculty mentors for their guidance, time, and commitment to the scholars, their research, and the program during these trying times. A particular word of thanks goes out to the families and extended support systems that made these outstanding presentations possible.

This year, we are honoring Aaron Booker, Brooke Finister, and Melody Mann. Aaron Booker's work is called, "Teach Us How: Love, Relationships, and Resistance," and he will be attending University of Central Florida in the fall of 2020. Brooke Finister's work is called, "Post Postblack: Rethinking Contemporary Black Art in 2020 Art Culture," and she will be attending Columbia University in fall 2020. Melody Mann's work is called, "Understanding Teacher-Child Interactions in the Preschool Setting," and she will be attending California Polytechnic State University in fall 2020.

On the cover of this year's journal, we have highlighted Brooke Finister's artwork, which reflects Brooke's journey as a black woman, and as a McNair Scholar at San José State University who accomplished so much and is now looking forward to her bright future as a graduate student at Columbia University.

In this special edition, we are recognizing and honoring our students who would usually stand up at our McNair Research Reception and talk about their research, where they are going to graduate school, and who they want to thank. We have given them the space to do that in this journal during this

pandemic, since this cannot be done in person. We are grateful for these virtuoso McNair Scholars for their continued brilliance and resilience.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FROM OUR HONOREES

*Aarron Booker*

I cannot say this earnestly without admitting that I do not possess the vocabulary to express my gratitude, but I will still try my best. This journey has been 8 years, 3 different institutions, and 3 different majors long. My time at SJSU taught me a lot and I am grateful for the relationships and connections that I formed along the way. So, I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you.

To my family: Together we learned the value of sacrifices. It is not easy being 355 miles apart from my support system; however, I am thankful for the tools that you gave me through various lessons along the way. Mom, you always said this first degree is yours, so here you go. Rodney, there is not a day that passes where you are not a source of inspiration for me. Your courage to learn and grow pushes me to go even further. Nana, you always told me if I gave it my best, that even if I failed, I still succeeded. All of my brothers, thank you isn't sufficient, but given the space requirements it will have to do.

To my department: Dr. Millner, your influence has been immeasurable in my growth. Even though it took me a while to learn a lesson from your parable, I still got what I needed out of them. Dr. Gaines, thank you for being there for me throughout this tempest of an academic year and providing guidance as well as insight. Dr. Carter-Francique, thank you for running this race with me. You have helped me in ways that I could not have imagined and will still reflect on in the future. Dr. Thompson-Taiwo, I have a picture that sits in your office, and memorizes that will last a lifetime. Thank you for never stifling my creativity and allowing me to mold my research to meet my interests. Leslie and Tiffany, thank you for the lessons you imparted on me, and helping through the mornings, even though I'm still not much of a morning person. Lastly, Dr. Berry thank you for investing in me. The foundation of a lot of the work I will do in the future was nurtured through observing and interacting with you, thank you for being exactly who you are.



To my friends: Marcell, thank you for convincing me to come out to those club meetings; it was a leap of faith that I do not regret, and our friendship isn't one that I take lightly. Aja, thank you for being who you are. You have been the flame to my wick, and a lot of what I do, will do, and have done is softened by your presence. You are a dope person, and I am eternally thankful for your presence in my life. My mentees/ "kids" are included in this section and I have a message for all of you. "No matter what decision you decide to make, or choices you pursue. Please know that I will always love and be proud of you."

To MOSAIC and AABSSC: Thank you for supporting my programs, and my goals. Your support has made a lot of the visions that I have had possible, and without them I would not have been able to create the opportunities I was fortunate enough to be a part of.

Lastly, To McNair: Dr. Cruz, you took a gamble in letting me into the cohort for this semester. The risk you took has meant the world to me because you saw the value in my work and what I can do. Martha, thank you for your patience and kindness. Linette and Taylor-Dawn, thank you for teaching me both inside and outside of the classroom; your lessons have been invaluable.

## *Brooke Finister*

McNair means an opportunity to push yourself harder on a path geared towards giving you the upper hand. As a first-generation student, I did something bold – choosing to study my passion for art. I didn't know that research would become a part of my career, but it has proven to be the right path to push me to be a better academic. I'm excited to be the first in my family to go to graduate school, and I am excited for all that I will be learning in the next chapter of my life. My academics have grown me into a better, well-rounded individual that can handle the challenge and the joy of having a packed schedule. I will vow to make more time for fun, but my productivity is something that I plan to increase through the skills of efficiency I learned while attending San José State University.

I have found ease in being able to do independent study and have grown into an avid reader and note-taker from being in the program. I don't know what graduate school will entail, but I know I feel most prepared for the reading assignments and the group work. Being able to specialize in my classes is something I enjoyed in the last two years here and knowing that I will have more mobility is going to make for some fantastic projects I hope to share soon.

I'm sure a lot of us have had made their peace with quarantine with some funny habits, but I'd like to share some post-quarantine goals: I hope to spend a full weekend at the beach, travel to Seattle and Portland for the coffee and roller skating, see the Grand Canyon, and to go to Disneyland. I have spent so much time reading and painting, that I will be genuinely grateful to be able to spend time outside with friends and family. I think of the food and the memories to be made after graduation and quarantine, and I challenge everyone to cherish each day a little more and to “risk it for the biscuit.”

I want to thank the program and the friends I have made here for giving me encouragement and sharing some laughs along the way. What lies ahead is something I hope to be a model for the next art history student looking to move further in their career. I will dearly miss my friends and my West Coast life because I will be attending school in New York, but I'm excited about the adventure. For everyone coming behind me in the

program, I wish you all the best and encourage you to keep pushing even when you're lost because it makes sense with time.

## *Melody Mann*

“ਮਨਿ ਜੀਤੈ ਜਗੁ ਜੀਤੁ” - Guru Nanak Dev Ji  
*Conquer the mind, Conquer the world.*

As a first-generation woman of color, navigating higher education was a journey that truly tested my abilities. Education is a virtue that I have fought hard to claim. It was not an easy feat, for my mind constantly nagged at me – imposter syndrome, insecurities, self-doubt, and isolation. I learned through dedication and determination that in order to see my vision through, I would need to overcome my self-doubt and charge forward. Through owning my identity, I was able to become comfortable in the spaces I occupied. My journey led me to lab internships, research opportunities, and multiple mentorships that cultivated my goal to strive for a PhD in Special Education. I want to be a voice that enables and advocates for differently abled individuals in both the educational and public sphere. Social activism, mental health, and special education are fields I believe will help me conquer the world. I want to live in a world that is adept in catering to individuals of all backgrounds and needs, regardless of their class, creed, ethnic origin, or socioeconomic status. Through my work, I seek to bring linguistic and cultural inclusivity into educational spaces that are innately segregated by the infrastructures instilled by institutions.

I am the daughter of Punjabi immigrants. Growing up, I witnessed my family endure countless adversities to enable me to become the woman I am today. Through my grandparents establishing themselves in this country, to my parents working multiple jobs to put food on the table, my success is a salute to their contributions. I proceed with my dreams of higher education in honor of my family, my grandparents, and my uncle. I seek to become an educator so I may fulfill my late uncle’s – Harpreet Rai – dream of serving the community through education. I seek to push through a doctorate degree to fulfill my late grandfather’s – Channan Rai – dream of being a lifelong learner. I will do this all with a smile on my face because my grandma, Surjit Rai, taught me that is the strongest attribute a woman can flaunt. Through their lived experiences, I wish to inform my own practice by remaining mindful, humble, and sincere in all engagements I take on from this day forward. I owe a heartfelt thank you to Mom, Dad,

and my older sister for allowing me to test boundaries, explore life, and embrace my dreams.

Life has blessed me with a variety of encounters that shape my perception about the world we can live in with compassion and sensitivity. Completing college would not be possible without a community. Through my undergraduate career, I have formed a support group that has grown to be a second family. Warm hugs for my beloved friends Isabel Rangel, Sana Rahim, and Brooke Finister. These three women have stood by my side through thick and thin, sharing all the joys and sorrows this world entails. With their wisdom, support, and laughs, I have grown as a student and researcher. Had it not been for the McNair Scholars Program, I would have not had the chance to connect with them on such a deep level. I am fortunate that the TRIO program is in place because it gave me a platform to essentially flourish from.

Although life is filled with uncertainty and fear, push through and conquer your fears in pursuit of your dreams – the sky's the limit.

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