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## Introduction

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# INTRODUCTION



**Dr. Heather Neff, Ph.D.**

Director, Eastern Michigan University  
McNair Scholars Program  
Professor of English  
EMU Distinguished Professor  
Michigan Distinguished Professor

Uncountable words have been written about the pressures the world has faced due to the emergence of the Coronavirus. The sudden transition of university education from classroom and laboratory to a computer balanced on a pillow, a tablet on a kitchen table, or in some cases, to a telephone held in a student's hand, required a shift in every aspect of pedagogical practice and means of learning. Underlying the very real challenges faced by students and educators were the immeasurable financial impacts, horrific health consequences, and in the Detroit region, a sharply disproportionate mortality rate experienced by people of color due to the pandemic. This situation was only exacerbated by the murder of George Floyd and subsequent mass demonstrations against police brutality, which were seen around the world.

For undergraduates who were infants on September 11, 2001, the pandemic of 2020 and the Black Lives Matter protests will be touchstone events for the rest of their lives. The dual and often conflicting challenges of remaining sequestered during state-mandated lockdowns, despite the overwhelming desire to join the massive demonstrations protesting police brutality, have forced many of us to question how we can best use our talents to serve our family, community, and ultimately, ensure better lives for all.

In a year unlike any other, the students in the Eastern Michigan University McNair Scholars Program have succeeded in completing complex research projects, writing scholarly papers, and advancing toward graduate studies. I am exceptionally proud of the ten students whose work comprises Volume 13 of the Eastern Michigan University *McNair Scholars Research Journal*, not only because of their perseverance in a

time of profound societal disruption, but also because of the range and scope of their subjects: substance abuse by student athletes; the effects of stress on African American women; the use of 3-D printing in manufacturing better prostheses for those who have lost a limb, and best practices in preventing sexually transmitted infections in adolescent communities. Two scholars fearlessly interrogate the power of social media as a tool for marginalized discourse. Another offers a study that adds to the literature focused on protecting the environment. While the events of 2020 might have discouraged many students from completing their projects, the EMU McNair Scholars held fast to their belief that their work will lead to positive change in the days to come.

Indeed, the papers in this journal signify hope: hope that we will reconstitute the services needed to provide assistance to all members of our society; hope that we will continue to research, investigate, and contribute to the larger discourse about race, gender, equity, and access. Above all, participants in the McNair Program responsibly represent the next generation of academic and professional leaders in our world.

The Eastern Michigan University McNair Scholars Program offers students from first-generation, low-income and underrepresented homes the opportunity to engage in three years of research training, faculty mentorship, writing support, and individual advising. Our goal is to prepare our students for admission to graduate programs and success in earning doctoral degrees. Over its thirteen-year history, the EMU McNair Program has served some 186 students, with the majority having published in this journal. To date, all of our students have completed bachelor's degrees. With graduate degree enrollment in over 23 states, over 85 students have pursued or completed master's degrees, some 20 students have continued to doctoral studies, 7 have earned the doctoral degree, and 4 have accepted positions as tenure-track professors. I am proud to have dedicated the past ten years of my work to the fine students of the Eastern Michigan University McNair Scholars Program.

EMU McNair's continuing success is largely due to the generous support of our administrators, faculty, and staff, including Dr. Rhonda Longworth, Dr. James Smith, Dr. Arnold Fleischmann, Dr. Ellen Koch, Dr. Sarah Huyvaert, Professor Julia Nims, Dr. Christine Deacons, Dr. Eric Reed, Colonel Wayne Doyle, Roderick Wallace, Josiah Pankiewicz, Susan Campbell and Caryn Charter.

The faculty mentors who have dedicated time, patience, and their commitment to our scholars' excellence include Dr. Jamie Cornelius, Dr. Joan Cowdery, Dr. Brendan Fay, Dr. Celeste Hawkins, Dr. Heather Janisse,

Dr. Kristin Judd, Dr. Éric Paradis, Dr. Nick Romerhausen, Dr. Jeffrey Schulz, and Dr. MacArthur Stewart.

The Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program honors the late physicist and astronaut, Dr. Ronald E. McNair. The EMU McNair Program annually serves thirty-six high-achieving sophomores, juniors and seniors from first-generation, low-income or under-represented groups (African American, Native American, Hispanic or Alaskan Native / Pacific Islander). The program prepares its participants for admission to graduate programs and the successful completion of doctoral studies.

Congratulations to the ten McNair Scholars published in Volume 13 of the *McNair Scholars Research Journal*.



**Dr. Jasmine A. Lee, MSW, Ph.D.**

Director of Inclusive Excellence

University of Maryland

Baltimore Campus

Eastern Michigan University McNair Scholar

Class of 2009

The very first time my name was found in print and associated with a journal article was in the initial volume of the Eastern Michigan University *McNair Scholars Research Journal*. I, along with nine others, made up the first class of the EMU McNair Program in 2008. I graduated in 2009 and went on to complete my Master's in Social Work at the University of Michigan and my Ph.D. at Michigan State University, in 2011 and 2016 respectively. It is now 2020, and a great deal has changed. It is likely that this year's McNair Journal is reaching you either in some level of quarantine, or having recently been released from some level of quarantine. It is likely that this year has been nothing like what you've ever experienced before: The impact of a global pandemic.

The coronavirus has swept across the earth, leading to mandated quarantine, "stay at home," or "shelter in place" orders in almost all 50 states, and in almost all countries across the globe. Borders have closed,

trade has significantly decreased, and even travel has come to a halt. Masks are now mandated for public engagement. Universities and K-12 school districts have closed physical buildings to opt for distance learning, while the U.S. unemployment rate is above 11%. Great disparities along racial and socio-economic lines, which have always existed, have been significantly illuminated in the wake of the COVID-19 impact. We have experienced rising daily death tolls, to the point where news programs include a corona infection and death ticker at the bottom of the screen. Some of us have been forced to stand outside of a hospital building as our loved ones took their last breath alone. Great loss, confusion, frustration, anxiety, isolation, shock, distrust, grief, and fear have settled in the air. Even as I write this I wonder how we will survive this?

*Pause. Take a deep breath. A long deep breath.*

In the midst of what has been a detrimental impact, there is also the presence of light, a silver lining of sorts we likely did not expect. I live in Baltimore, MD., a busy, congested metropolitan area on the east coast. We move quickly and we move often. For the past 6-9 weeks, things have slowed to a screeching halt. I have seen clear skies, free of smog. I have experienced less driving and more walking, and even more “lolly-gagging” as people appreciate spring for what may be the first time we’ve slowed down enough to see it. I’ve heard stories about families finally being able to spend time with their children and partners, and narratives of busy corporate leaders who haven’t taken the time to focus on their own thoughts in decades. I’ve personally experienced sleep in a way I haven’t known in what feels like a lifetime.

The past several months haven’t been easy. They’ve been downright awful for many of us. And yet, when we are willing to widen our perspective, we’re able to see not only the beast of this experience, but also the beauty. I know many of us have been told to remain positive and only focus on what is right in the world. That is not my argument. I have learned that the best life is the one lived in duality. To widen our perspective is not to change it, but instead to welcome all perspectives. In the midst of darkness, a widened perspective allows in light. The coronavirus impact has shown us that things in this life are really difficult, yet this life is still worth living.

During significant challenge, deep resilience, tenacity, and courage are revealed. With immense tears and great sorrow, strength, love, and joy can still emerge. With the uncertainty of normality looming over us, faith in one another, collective strength, empathy, and shared responsibility is what will propel us forward. In this moment, as we exist in a

global pandemic, your work holds even greater value. Your research is a light toward our future, even in the midst of perceived darkness. Thank you for sharing your gift with us in this moment of our history. Your legacy continues here. When the road ahead gets tough, know that you matter, your work matters, and that you can always find support in the McNair community.