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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION



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My name is Dr. Carmen M. McCallum and I assumed the role as McNair Scholars Director at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) January, 2022. I am excited to have been given this opportunity to lead such a dynamic program geared towards preparing low-income first generation and students of color to successfully pursue and enroll in graduate degree programs. EMU's McNair Scholars program has been an incredibly successful program since it began in 2007. Based on the current grant cycle (2017–2022), 100% of our scholars have completed research and/or scholarly activities, 76% enrolled in a graduate degree program immediately following completion of their bachelor degrees and 75% persisted to a second year of graduate school. The scholars in this current journal are standing on the shoulders of those who have been academically successful. I am confident the McNair scholars in this journal will continue this legacy by continuing to strive for academic excellence and enrolling and obtaining their doctoral degrees.

To write this introduction, I reviewed all of EMU's McNair Scholars Research journals. What I found is that some directors choose to be brief in their remarks while others choose to be more prolific; highlighting the current societal trends as a way to provide context for why the scholars may have chosen to research the topics for their manuscript. McNair alumni, the University Provost, mentors, current students, and supporters from various aspects of EMU's academic community who were enlisted to write something for the introduction also varied immensely in their writings. All profound and meaningful, yet unique in their own way. Thus, when I was preparing this statement, there was no rubric. Considering this will be my first of many introductions, I pondered deeply about what I wanted to write. We are living in very interesting times. We

are still attempting to understand the social, moral and financial impacts of COVID-19 and the racial pandemic that was heightened by the murder of Mr. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and countless others on our students during the 2020-2021 academic school year. Simultaneously we must continue to acknowledge that thousands of Americans are still being hospitalized and dying with COVID-19 every day. We have Monkeypox, territorial wars and political unrest, all, which in some ways, impact our scholars. These topics come up in our McNair scholar seminars and often shape the research our scholars choose to pursue. Yet, in reviewing the manuscripts, I found it difficult to find a common thread that tied all the manuscripts together. Most of the articles focus on underrepresented populations, with the goal of bringing awareness to the problem in order to spark solutions. But overall, we have seven different authors with six different majors writing about seven different topics. Upon pondering this dilemma, I realized that the complexities and individuality of these manuscripts honors the mission of McNair. It is our goal. It is our mission, to encourage individual scholars to explore research topics that interest them to fuel their passion to pursue and enroll in graduate studies. McNair is not about uniformity. Scholars across academic disciplines are welcomed to be a part of the program. Therefore, this introduction will highlight each scholar and the main topic of their article in order to bring attention to their uniqueness. It is my hope that these brief synapses will inspire you to continue reading and learn more about their important work.

Ta'Aha Biles is a social work major. Her article, *The Role of Special Education Advocates on the Lives of Students Facing Challenges*, examines the role of special education advocates for minority students with learning disabilities. Her literature review highlights the challenges that families have advocating for their student without an advocate and the ways that a highly qualified advocate can make a difference between a student dropping out of school and/or transitioning into post-secondary education. She concludes by highlighting the disparities in service for students of color and offers suggestions for how future research may further examine this issue.

Odia Kaba is majoring in economics and minoring in psychology. Her manuscript, *The Impact of Foreign Direct Investment and Aid on Standard of Living: Evidence from West Africa*, shines a light on the impact of China's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Foreign Aid (FAD) in West Africa for individuals living in West Africa. Utilizing an econometric analysis and ordinary least square regression model Kaba determines

that the aide does not make the impact that one would expect. She concludes by offering suggestions for why this may be occurring and encourages researchers to further investigate the topic.

Justice Mangual majored in communication management. His article, *The Progression of LGBTQ+ Acceptance in K-12 Schools in the United States: A Critical Literature Review*, illuminates the bullying that LGBTQ+ students have endured over the years. Mangual describes different types of bullying and the detrimental impact it can have on young individuals. He concludes with suggestions for how schools can make it safer for LGBTQ+ students and a call for scholars to continue research on this topic.

Shaniqwa M. Martin is majoring in environmental science and societal interdisciplinary studies concentrating in atmosphere and climate. Her manuscript, *Environmental Injustice: Spatial Analysis of Air Pollution in Detroit*, examines the history of environmental racism and unfair housing practices in the city of Detroit. Focusing on toxin-producing sites and formerly redlined neighborhoods, Martin reviews data which covers a five-year time span and uncovers that minority communities are greater affected by increased industrial sites than other communities.

Jacklyn C. Staffeld is a psychology major minoring in criminology and criminal justice. Her article, *Probing The Role Of The Ventral Hippocampus to Nucleus Accumbens Pathways In Individuals Difference In Appetitive Learning*, explores why some individuals can actively use addictive drugs and quit with relative ease, and others are addicted after only one dose. Utilizing an experimental design, Staffeld discovers there may be a difference in one brain pathway versus another as it pertains to addiction.

Victoria M. Strickland is a social work major. Her manuscript, *A Fight To Be Seen: Black Girls and Discipline*, is a literature review that focuses on zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline, and the school-to-prison pipeline for students of color. Although over the years acknowledgement of this phenomenon has gained, a discussion of the impact of these practices for Black girls has been absent from the literature. Strickland shines a light on this issue and calls for researchers, policy makers and teachers to focus more attention on the impact of these practices on Black girls.

Edgar J. Vasquez is a philosophy major minoring in psychology. His article, *Descartes Meets Samkhya*, explores Dualism and the Mind-Body problem through the teaching of two philosophers—Descartes and Samkhya. Vasquez is eloquent in his depiction of the literary sparring

that occurs between Descartes and Samkhya. He concludes by suggesting that despite their differences, these two philosophers' ideas may be closer than previously displayed in past literature.



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This pursuit of knowledge that we call research is a powerful entity. On a broader scale, the research enterprise is the fuel for discoveries and mobilizes new knowledge to the rest of the world. Research can also change the trajectory of individual goals, and for me, influenced the driving force of my career. Ten years ago, if you told the naïve, scared 17-year-old girl who came to college that she would be writing these words, she wouldn't have believed you. Now? These words come from a woman who has evolved into her power. The intellectual ideas from the scholars in this volume of the McNair Scholars Research Journal is proof of them stepping into their power

Therefore, I hope readers of this journal appreciate the mental and emotional journey that McNair scholars undertook to achieve this goal. Often in research, we devalue the undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral fellows that steer the research enterprise. Even more, we do not hear the powerful voices and experiences of our BIPOC and first-generation peers. Only in recent years have we started to listen, and initiated the infrastructure needed to support the well-being of researchers. However, there is still much work to be done. And if I can impart one wisdom to young scholars in this part of their journey: Never doubt how wildly capable you are. You belong in these spaces, discussions, and solutions. Your voices need to be heard, particularly in this world where research evidence is received with overwhelming skepticism. Your lived experiences in positions of training, oversight, and leadership are needed. The research enterprise needs to become a more diverse populace, and we

are the shepherds of that change. So, in this moment, thank you for this commitment to research and sharing of your knowledge.

Moving forward, take these words, and the words that you have written in this journal, as evidence that you are a force to be reckoned with. The work in this journal is the embodiment of your growing power that you will use to affect the world with your pursuit of knowledge.