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Introduction

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Introduction

Dr. Rhonda Longworth, Ph.D.

Provost and Executive Vice President

Eastern Michigan University

Over the past few years I've had the great opportunity to learn about the McNair Scholars Program and the scientist, Dr. Ronald E. McNair, for whom the program is named. I was a first year student at the University of Iowa as I watched the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion play over and over again on a television screen. Like so many students, I had tears at the shock of such an unexpected tragedy. Losing those scientists and explorers, including Dr. McNair, seemed a terrible affront to the hope they set out with that morning. The sting of it brought home just how sad and isolated I felt that first year of school, and just how much I wanted to quit.

Yet here I am, thirty-one years and two degrees later, with the great honor of introducing this volume of scholarship authored by the students of Eastern Michigan University's McNair Scholars Program. I am deeply inspired by this volume and all the student work and accomplishment it represents. Taking chances in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding is not always easy, and the authors in this volume have put forth tremendous effort and explored exciting ideas and lines of inquiry. Though the journey was long and often difficult, I am so glad I stayed in college and found my way here. As I reflect on my beginnings, endings, hopes, and opportunities since the day I first learned about Dr. McNair, I realize I know a few things for sure.

I know that scientists and explorers like Ronald McNair are needed now more than ever, as we struggle with questions about what is true and what is truly important. We need individuals who seek evidence to prove theories, who innovate and solve problems, who form communities to advance new ideas and skeptically question what others may accept without question or evidence. Critical thought and analysis are woefully underappreciated skills in an age of commentary delivered in 140 characters or less. This volume and its authors represent all that is valuable about more considered, deliberative thought, research and creative activity.

I know that a public commitment to educating citizens has driven the advancement of one of the most vital societies in

world history. Over the last 60 years, the investment made to send more and more American citizens to college has paid off with unprecedented economic innovation, expansion, creativity and prosperity. The federal investment in programs such as McNair, the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the financial aid system, and the GI Bill, has fueled tremendous expansion in industry, and massive growth in the information and knowledge available to the world. As citizens, we owe a debt of gratitude for a world created through programs such as McNair and its beneficiaries.

I know that when I stand back and reflect on the totality of it all, research-fueled progress since 1986 fills me with wonder. In 1986, we wrote papers with typewriters and dialed phones connected with cords. I wouldn't use a Mac until a year later. The Space Shuttle was still a marvel to behold. Personally, college opened doors to experiences I never imagined. I hadn't yet read an Alice Munro short story, heard a bell hooks reading, attended a Shakespeare performance, or seen a Rothko painting. I attended college on Pell Grants and Work Study, working while I studied, and finding my way. And finally, one day, my fear started to melt a little. A professor saw something in me and suggested I research Political Science. The students in this volume had great mentors like mine. I know that we all deserve to be seen, to speak our minds, and to make a difference. Lifting each other up and building public capacity pays off for us all.

I know this volume makes a difference for our community and for the authors whose work fills its pages. It sets in motion a process whereby these authors contribute to all that has come before and all that will follow. They are now published authors moving along the winding, complicated road of making society better and more informed. They also didn't quit when challenged — they dug in and finished something of lasting value. They remind me of why we keep going after days like that day in 1986, when Dr. Ronald E. McNair was lost. Building and changing are exciting pursuits. Research is compelling. And making a difference is the greatest reward.



Dr. Heather Neff, Ph.D.

Director, EMU McNair Scholars Program

Professor of English

Michigan Distinguished Professor

For the past decade Eastern Michigan University has hosted a Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program—fondly known on our campus as the McNair Scholars Program. Funded by grants from the federal Department of Education, our program has offered highly individualized and group services to some 130 hardworking and high-achieving students. Indeed, over the three years of their participation in EMU McNair, our young scholars conduct increasingly challenging research with one or more faculty mentors, present their research at national and professional conferences, engage in specialized summer research programs, and publish their work in the EMU McNair Scholars Research Journal. These are far from easy tasks.

EMU McNair Scholars attend weekly seminars to learn the purpose and value of research, gain effective writing and presentation skills, and improve their ability to manage stress, anxiety, and the ever-present “Imposture Syndrome.” By working closely with research faculty, they discover the challenges and rewards of teaching, scholarship and intellectual endeavor. Our students learn to work together, to work independently, and most importantly, they learn to set high personal goals and to follow their dreams.

Every student selected to become a McNair Scholar commits to completing a bachelor’s degree, immediately continuing on to graduate study and, within ten years, to earning a doctoral degree. This is a tall challenge, considering the fact that only 4% of Americans have earned a Ph.D. The majority of McNair Scholars are the first person in their family to undertake post-secondary studies, and many work long hours to pay the ever-increasing costs of college housing and tuition. Unsure how to navigate the culture of Higher Education, they must determine how to balance the demands of academic coursework with their

financial responsibilities. As McNair participants, they must find additional time to work in the lab, conduct surveys, read scholarly articles, prepare papers for presentation, and to meet regularly with their mentors.

Though these tasks are certainly daunting, somehow McNair Scholars find a way to achieve them. Semester after semester their names remain on the Dean's List. They earn departmental scholarships and institutional funding from both the Provost and the Honors College for the quality of their research. They showcase their findings at EMU's prestigious Undergraduate Symposium and at professional conferences across our nation. They apply to graduate programs, are accepted, and go on to exceptional academic and professional lives. Over the past ten years, students from the Eastern Michigan University McNair Scholars Program have entered doctoral studies at a rate far above the national average. Our students' courage, perseverance, and determination—otherwise known as “grit”—are a great honor to the memory of Dr. Ronald McNair.

This, the 10th volume of the EMU *McNair Scholars Research Journal*, contains fourteen papers on subjects as wide-ranging as the development of an electronically-controlled diode laser system, to the definition of “consent” as a factor in campus sexual assault. One of our Scholars examines the effectiveness of U.S. development aid in Sub-Saharan Africa, while another discusses species variation in three genetically similar plants in Madagascar. Black men's resistance to Black Feminism is explored alongside a study on the effects of submergence depths on the sea lamprey, a fish-parasite that has caused great risk to the Great Lakes ecosystem.

Among the ninety-five papers published over the life of our journal, these new works provide sound evidence of the immense intellectual curiosity and scholarly aptitude of our students. In my seven years as McNair Director I have had the great privilege to teach, advise, and guide some of our future leaders in all sectors of industry, politics, and education. Needless to say, I am deeply moved by their focus, strength, and fearlessness, as they move forward in a complex and often confounding world.

As editor, I am proud to offer Volume 10 of the Eastern Michigan University *McNair Scholars Research Journal* to the world. Our deepest thanks go out to the faculty who have spent many hours working with these students, and to the Administration of our university, which continues to offer full and unwavering support to our program.

I become more certain, with every passing day, that the future is McNair!

