**The Magic of Our Stories**

From our childhood to adulthood, author J.K. Rowling offered us a world of magic in her stories about young *Harry Potter*. Though we could not fight Death Eaters to save the day in the real world, Rowling reminds us that, “We do not need magic to change the world! We carry all the power we need inside of us already: *We have the power to imagine better!*”

As McNair Scholars, we challenge the world’s perception of us every day. We imagine better for ourselves, and better for those to come after us. In this, my final issue as Guest Editor of *The Challenger*, I hope to share the thoughts of *McNair seniors* as we talk about our time here at EMU. Let us celebrate all our accomplishments together, and rejoice as we continue to turn our imaginations into reality!

- Shahana Chumki, McNair Scholar

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**Love Where You Come From**

by Mikki Smith, *magna cum laude*, Social Work

During my time here at EMU, I have grown in so many ways! I’ve grown intellectually because the clubs and organizations I joined taught me *taught me to think*. I learned that my opinion is valuable and that it’s okay to dig a little deeper and to voice my opinion on issues I view as important. Eastern helped me to grow by encouraging me to become an advocate, not only for myself, but also for those who may need support when voicing their own beliefs.

I *dare* all my fellow McNair Scholars to dream your wildest dreams! Remember that you’ve worked hard and deserve all the good things to come. I am excited about attending the Master’s of Social Work Program in Community, Leadership and Policy at Wayne State University because it encompasses everything I love and believe in. I look forward to working with the population I’ve been committed to serve: Detroit natives. I love the city I come from, and can’t wait to conduct research that will help those within the Detroit community, and communities similar to it. Thank you to Dr. Janet Okagbue-Reaves and EMU McNair.

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**One Step Closer**, by Kayla Boyd, *summa cum laude*, Journalism and Apparel & Textile Merchandising

EMU has given me my independence and confidence. My college experience here has shown me that I can truly do anything I set my mind to. It has been a life changing four years, with so many opportunities to travel, give presentations, meet new people and really put myself out there. I can’t say that I’d change any of my experiences because in the end, it took both the good and the bad to make me stronger, smarter and better. That’s why, I’d remind future McNair Scholars: *Don’t doubt yourself, ever!* Have confidence in your interests, in your research and in your abilities.

Yes, I’m very nervous about leaving Michigan—but I’m also very excited! I’m ready for the next chapter of my life—my Master’s at the Newhouse School of Journalism at Syracuse University—and I can’t wait to be in a new place, with new challenges, and new people! Thanks to McNair and my mentor, Dr. Carol Schlagheck, I’m one step closer to my career, and that feels really great!
Three years ago, I received a letter that completely changed my life. It was a letter from EMU’s music program, and just like the other schools where I’d auditioned, they were writing to tell me I had not been accepted. I was nearly finished with my second year of my Vocal Performance major at Northwestern Michigan College, and I had a decision to make: should I re-audition, or did I change my major? After considering my grades, my health, and my academic interests, I decided to change my major to Linguistics before transferring to EMU.

In the beginning I was depressed, anxious, and very insecure in myself. Since then, I’ve thankfully been able to learn how to manage my depression and anxiety, which has made a world of difference in the way I view myself and the challenges and opportunities I encounter! I’ve become more confident in myself, as well as proud of my intelligence, love of learning, and very nerdy interests. I’m thankful for all of the people I’ve met and the opportunities I’ve been given. The fact that I’m beginning a Doctoral Program at the University of Michigan in the fall is nerve-wracking, but I’m excited to start this next chapter of my life and to see how I grow in the coming years. My mentor, Dr. Eric Acton, has been absolutely fantastic throughout this entire experience. He was instrumental in helping me with graduate school applications by giving me suggestions on my personal statements and interview techniques. Having Dr. Acton as my mentor has been a great experience, and I am incredibly thankful for his encouragement and everything he’s done!

Due to the fact that I am very far away from home (the Dominican Republic), I did not have the typical family support or the sense of home that most students have when coming to college. While attending EMU, I encountered both positive and negative experiences, thrusting me into many uncomfortable situations that I had to face without that kind of support. Yet living in a culture so different from my own has made me much stronger, and I do not regret any of my experiences. I analyze each experience and I keep moving forward. Throughout my time as president of EMU’s Latino Student Association, and my participation in the McNair Program, I acquired leadership skills, research skills, as well as interview skills. Furthermore, I cannot wait to move to the University of Pittsburgh for Master’s of Social Work studies. I have lived here in Ypsilanti for four years, and I am ready to move on to my next adventure. Yet none of this would have been possible without Dr. Yvette Colon. I could not have asked for a better mentor, and I am appreciative of all the efforts she put into making me the scholar I am today.

Life is really funny. We try to envision the certain paths our lives will take. We try our best to make sure every action, spoken word, and thought leads to our desired goals in life. Yet life has a way of twisting the expected into the unexpected. I did not expect to come to college. I did not expect to arrive to EMU as a Presidential scholar. I did not expect to fall in love with Biology and the idea of research. I never expected that my decisions would lead to me a career in academia. My time here at EMU was a blessing. The people, the faculty, and the environment have transformed me from an anxious individual to a scholar. I would not be where I am without the effort and guidance of my mentor, Dr. Anne Casper. I have grown to appreciate all the things she, my peers, and family have done for me. I am a much more confident woman, and that confidence is what I will take with me as I transition to graduate school. I admit that I am terrified of the changes and the challenges that are looming, but just as I worked my way through undergrad, I will work just as hard, or harder, in graduate school. To all current and future McNair Scholars, I have only one thing to say: do the work. The McNair program works, and just like anything else in life, you have to put in the effort to get the glory. So right now, my journey at EMU is coming to a close. Its time to celebrate. Time to laugh. Time to cry. Time to enjoy and let the fireworks begin!
A Moment of Reflection, by Kimberly Freeman, McNair Program Specialist

As the winter 2016 semester comes to a close, I felt compelled to extend a note of congratulations to our graduating seniors. Cheers to you for your many accomplishments as upcoming graduates. From your membership in the Honors College, to your abundant scholarships and awards during your tenure here at Eastern, to the enumerable graduate school acceptances (most with funding packages to finance your future studies), 

commend yourselves on a job well done! I am encouraged by your perseverance, dedication, and fortitude to continue on this academic journey, despite

2016 Graduate School Admissions!
(the Scholar’s choice is indicated in boldface)

Rasheed Atwater (Dr. Anna Ferreira, mentor): Master’s Program in History at Eastern Michigan University

Kayla Boyd (Dr. Carol Schlagheck, mentor): Master’s Programs in Journalism at Northwestern University, Boston University, Northeastern University, City University of New York and the Newhouse School of Journalism at Syracuse University.

Tiffany Browne (Dr. Ramona Caponegro, mentor): M.A. Programs in Higher Education / Student Affairs at Eastern Michigan University, University of Indiana, University of Michigan and Bowling Green University

Dominique Canning (Dr. Eric Acton, mentor): Doctoral Program in Linguistics at the University of Michigan, M.A. programs at N.C. State, University of Colorado-Boulder, Georgetown University, Commonwealth University

Shahana Chumki (Dr. Anne Casper, mentor): Doctoral Programs in the Biological Sciences at Wayne State University, Michigan State University, and the University of Michigan

Troy Deskin (Dr. Rusty McIntyre, mentor): Doctoral Program in Experimental Psychology at Ohio University

Diamond Jones (Dr. Maria Milletti, mentor): Doctoral Program in Chemistry at the University of Iowa

Rosaly Maldonado (Dr. Yvette Colon, mentor): Master’s in Social Work Program at the University of Pittsburgh and Fordham University.

Brialle Ringer (Dr. Marti Bombyk, mentor): Master’s in Social Work Program at Washington University, St. Louis., University of Seattle and Master’s of Sociology at Eastern Michigan University

Mikki Smith (Dr. Janet Okagbue-Reaves, mentor): Master’s of Social Work Program at Wayne State University, Pittsburg University, Washington University

Gloria Tonks (Dr. Yvette Colon, mentor): Masters of Social Work Program at Wayne State University

William Trice (Dr. Ernest Behringer, mentor): Master’s Program in Physics at Eastern Michigan University

I Am Ready, by Tiffany Browne, summa cum laude, Higher Education / Student Affairs

I have become a better version of myself in my time here at EMU. I’ve developed a stronger sense of self and a deeper understanding of who I am and what I want out of life. Becoming more confident and independent inside and outside of the classroom are two of the biggest things that I have taken away from my EMU experience. Most importantly, however, I have learned to live my life for myself, and to make my own decisions, because nobody knows me better than I know myself. I don’t think that I would change any of my experiences, even if I could.

I am incredibly excited to transition to graduate school! I can’t wait to share my passions with a new group of peers, faculty, and students in a new environment. The Master’s in Student Affairs program at the University of Michigan will offer me a strong foundation for my future personal and academic careers. I’m nervous, which is to be expected, but I’m also ready to accept the challenges that Master’s level work will bring. Yet none of this would have occurred without my incredible and supportive mentor, Dr. Ramona Caponegro—my teacher, my mentor, my advisor, my biggest supporter, and one of the most influential people in my academic career.
enduring hardship within your (continued on page 4) personal lives and potential barriers—any of which could have derailed you along the way.

In my role as McNair Program Specialist, I serve as your intermediary to the financial support that the McNair Program provides. But every so often, I am granted the opportunity to learn more about your lives and experiences, and to contribute directly to shaping your unique individual personalities. Through conversations in the office, at cultural events, conferences or during our awesome meals (remember Kansas City, Shahana?), I so am grateful to have served in this supportive capacity as a friend, confidant, supporter or cheerleader on the road to you achieving your goals!

As one part of the team that leads McNair, I truly believe that, as Jack Nicholson’s character, Colonel Jessup, says in A Few Good Men: “We are in the business of saving lives.” As such, I awake each day excited by the opportunity to do my part to assist you on the journey toward uncharted territories designed especially for you.

Well wishes on your continued success!! And—don’t forget to keep McNair posted, each step of the way!

### Summer Research Opportunity Programs:

**Brandie Bentley**, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Minority Health Disparities Summer Research Program

**Jesse Smith**, Internship Program in the Biomedical Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania, Leadership Alliance Summer Research at Brown University, Vanderbilt's Summer NSF-REU Program in Chemical Biology, Biosphere 2 REU Program in Environmental and Earth Sciences at the University of Arizona

**Mariah Brito**, Project SEED Mentor through American Chemical Society

**Allante Moon**, Summer Internship at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, Ann Arbor

**Yeliani Valdez**, Future Public Health Leaders Program at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

**Sina Webster**, Future Public Health Leader Program at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

**Larry Borum**, Summer Research Opportunity Program at the Ohio State University

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*Taking the Bitter with the Sweet*

by Dr. Heather Neff, EMU McNair Program Director

Dearest Seniors,

This time of year is always bittersweet for the McNair staff.

We’ve watched many of you grow from sophomores who hadn’t yet chosen a major, into poised and confident scholars who love what you do—and will soon be doing what you love. You have acquired an important set of academic, social and cultural skills during your McNair journey, and made some great friends, too. You understand the importance of building strong mentoring relationships with your future faculty and peers, and you know, most importantly, that you really can change the world!

We’ll miss you—but we wish you all the best and much happiness in the days and months to come. Be sure to come back and visit: speak at one of our seminars, share your research experiences, mentor a young person, and always, always, always find a way to give back to your community!

You are the future!
The future is McNair!

Congratulations, 2016 McNair Graduates!

Dr. Heather Neff, Ph.D.,
Director, EMU McNair