



# EMU McNair Challenger

**March 2018 Edition:** Eastern Michigan University McNair Scholars Program

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## THE JOURNEY TO THE PH.D.

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### McNair Program

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### **The Future is McNair!!**

#### Upcoming Events:

**Intern Research Paper Due**  
March 9

**EMU Graduate Open House**  
March 10, Student Center

**19<sup>th</sup> Annual National McNair  
Scholars Research  
Conference at the University  
of Maryland**  
March 15 - 18, College Park, MD

**38<sup>th</sup> Annual Undergraduate  
Symposium at EMU**  
March 23, Student Center

**Spring Recess**  
March 30 - April 1

**McNair Awards Celebration**  
April 6, 12-2 pm, McKenny Hall

**Commencement Ceremony**  
April 21

This month, we interviewed McNair Mentor **Dr. Celeste Hawkins, MSW, Ph.D.**, about her journey to the Doctorate. We also spoke with several EMU McNair alumnae to share their graduate school experiences and advice to our current scholars.

### *An Interview with Dr. Celeste Hawkins, MSW, Ph.D.*



#### **Please tell us a bit about yourself.**

I am a wife and proud mother of three wonderful children. All of my children have attended Ypsilanti Public Schools since kindergarten. My two daughters and son are currently in the sixth, eighth, and tenth grades at the International Baccalaureate middle and high school, Washtenaw International Middle Academy, and Washtenaw International High School. I hold a Doctorate in Education from Eastern Michigan University, a Master's degree in Social Work, and Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology.

My areas of interest include marginalized youth, educational equity in K-12 public schools, and culturally responsive pedagogical practices. I have served in various capacities as a practitioner and administrator in nonprofit organizations, public schools, and universities. I have a clinical and macro social work license in the state of Michigan.

#### **Tell us about your work in the community.**

I have a diverse range of experiences in the areas of juvenile justice, homelessness, literacy, family services, and education. My research focuses on marginalized youth, educational equity in K-12 public schools, and culturally responsive pedagogical practices. My professional career has been dedicated to working with vulnerable, oppressed, and underserved populations, and I have advocated for children and families, particularly those gripped by poverty and social injustice. In addition to my role as an Assistant Professor at EMU, I serve as Vice President of the Board of Education for Ypsilanti Community Schools (YCS). I also volunteer in various programs and agencies in Washtenaw County. I believe far too many children are not reaching their full academic potential, and I am committed to working towards a solution that brings *all* children into the fold of full participation to promote successful outcomes.

My research is focused on issues of urgent relevance to the professions of Social Work and Education, for the current crises in public education undermines the well-being of families and communities. As a faculty member at EMU, I am particularly interested in seeking ways to interrupt the "school-to-prison-pipeline" (continued on page 2).

Through shared research interests, my faculty colleague, Dr. Sarah Van Zoeren, and I have forged a dynamic partnership to develop a program that aims to interrupt this pipeline. The "Making Youth Matter Mentoring Program," in collaboration with YCS, devises strategies to empower youth to participate fully in their schools and communities.

This project is potentially significant in both social and scholarly domains. "Making Youth Matter" extends my dissertation research by assisting educators to address the academic, emotional and social challenges faced by students in our community.

I believe this work has tremendous scholarly potential because it achieves multiple goals at once--developing collaborative relationships with YCS; advancing University goals of community service, particularly to the Ypsilanti Community; developing rich learning opportunities for students; and devising a model program to address an urgent professional issue.

Making Youth Matter has enriched EMU's ability to prepare our students for Social Work practice and to better serve our community.

### **Tell us more about your journey to the Ph.D.**

As I reflect on my journey, I am reminded by the fact that obtaining my PhD was built upon a stage in which many players played a part. My decision to earn a doctoral degree was twofold. First, my parents had encouraged me to earn a Ph.D. since I was child, so I am grateful to have made them proud. Secondly, my role as a Youth Counselor at a detention facility was the turning point in my educational and professional journey. I was disturbed and quite frankly outraged that African-American youth were entering the justice system at alarming rates, while many were struggling to read. It was incomprehensible to me that young people could matriculate through their K-12 educational experience and not obtain fundamental reading, writing, and math skills. It was this experience that changed my trajectory. I decided to pursue my Ph.D. in Education, and I was fortunate to marry two fields I am deeply passionate about – Social Work and Education.

Completing your coursework in a doctoral program is challenging, but it is important to know that the dissertation process also requires a high level of discipline, focus, and determination that must be maintained in order to successfully matriculate through the program. It was incredibly important for me to complete my dissertation, not only to achieve my own personal and educational goals, but also out of respect for the sacrifices made by my family, whose unwavering support allowed me to complete my studies.

While earning a P.h.D. is an arduous task, is also incredibly rewarding, and I always encourage students to pursue the doctorate. As an African American woman, my parents instilled in me that fact that I deserve a seat at the table, and that I can accomplish anything. I am very well aware of the systemic issues

and barriers of racism and sexism that may impede our progress, but I focus on my responsibility to fulfill a purpose that is much greater than myself. The opportunity to pave the way, grab someone's hand and help them up the ladder that you climbed is incredibly rewarding and gratifying. It is *imperative* that you reach back as you climb.

### **What words of wisdom or inspiration would you share with our students?**

Stay diligent and focused. There will be many distractions along the way, but do not lose sight of your goal. One of my favorite quotes is by Marcus Garvey, which states: "Lose not courage, Lose not faith, go forward." I would encourage students to remember this inspirational quote: "When we lift others, we rise." I would also offer these words of encouragement by Oprah Winfrey: "Stay in the light" instead of succumbing to negativity and unproductive distractions.

### ***Here is a bulleted list of tips, I created when I was a student in the doctoral program.***

- Develop a clear, concise understanding of your topic and direction for your research;
- Develop a realistic timeline to complete tasks and meet writing deadlines;
- Your dissertation chair/committee wants to know you have solid knowledge about your chosen topic and can demonstrate an understanding of the various concepts and research conversations—current and past;
- Organize your work—electronic and hard copy versions—
- Invest in an external hard drive to back up documents; get in the habit of emailing documents to yourself;
- Research and apply for fellowships/funding to support your graduate studies;
- Build a strong support network as you go through the program.

And above all, build time in your schedule for writing, and take breaks!

*When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.*

-Audre Lorde

## *Jen's Newly Declassified Grad School Survival Guide*

**EMU McNair Scholar Jen Alexander, M.A. ('13), completed a Master's Degree at Columbia University, and now makes her home in New York.**



While at EMU I majored in English Education, and minored in Earth Science. I took this large jumble of literature, writing, linguistics, earth science, and teacher education courses with the intention of becoming a high school English and /or Earth Science teacher.

It was actually the goal of becoming a teacher that attracted me to Eastern. While in the program, though, I became dissatisfied with how education didn't seem to service students and teachers that well, so I decided to go straight into a Master's program, rather than into a teaching role. I ended up moving to New York and entering the Sociology and Education program at Teachers College, Columbia University. While in that program, I focused my learning on education policy, how the education system works, and how it could work better. My plan was to write a qualitative study of the schooling experiences of Black-White biracial women. I aimed to discuss their place in the curriculum, but I eventually wrote about negotiating and navigating social space in school.

The two years in my Masters program went by quickly. I have spent the last three years working, first, as a research associate in an education non-profit, studying school climate and social emotional learning. My most recent position is as a program coordinator for programs that train underrepresented junior faculty and postdocs in behavioral medicine to become independent researchers. This greatly reminds me of McNair, and I've been motivated to apply to Sociology Ph.D. programs in which I can focus on public policy.

McNair was great preparation for grad school. I was able to gain a solid research foundation and confidence in my independence as a researcher. When I entered grad school, I didn't have many insecurities about my ability to go through the research process, from developing a question, to writing my papers and presenting my work. There were moments, especially during my thesis, where I knew I would survive because

I had the experience of McNair and Dr. Neff's tough love. My last year at Eastern, I presented my McNair paper so many times that by the end I was completely confident about what I had to say. I stopped shaking and became comfortable in presenting in more conversational tones rather than staring at a page of notes. To this day I rarely use note cards when I give a presentation.

I also see McNair as a constant source of inspiration when times get tough. I often find myself thinking about my cohort members who were amazing cheer leaders and hype men. I remember the joy of playing "Cat Daddy," Jay-Z and Kanye's "Paris," and Miley's Cyrus' rendition of "Party in the U.S.A." (thanks Victor) with my cohort before we did a joint presentation during the MLK celebration week. I remember my cohort smiling back at me when I was nervous in Buffalo, and how we bonded at Niagara Falls. And I remember the pride of Dr. Neff's face when we presented at Colloquium in front of our friends and family. The benefit of that love and support is immeasurable.

Since I went straight through from kindergarten to my Masters, I was burned out and needed a break from being a student. The grass seemed greener on the "adult-with-a-job" side, so that's what I've been up to the for past three years. It's been an interesting and well-needed break, but I'm ready to get back to school. (\*Somewhere in the distance Kanye's "Little Jimmy" skits start playing\*)

The journey back to the Ph.D. has been stalled and full of insecurities. I find myself having to study for the GRE again without the help of the McNair prep classes. My research has been nonexistent. And I now have to track down my former professors for letters of recommendation. This was all much easier when I was a McNair scholar.

Over the long-term, I see myself as a professor making valuable contributions to the field of Sociology, and working with policy makers to ensure that policy decisions don't negatively affect the disenfranchised. I can also see myself working with students similar to McNair scholars, helping to train and encourage the next generation of researchers aiming to make the world a better place.

I'm sure you've heard it many times, but let me say it again: *Self-care is important*. There will most likely come a moment (or moments) where your responsibilities will take up all of your time. You'll need to check in with yourself to determine what you're going to prioritize in that moment. If it just so happens that what's being asked of you isn't your top priority, I want (continued on page 4)

you to remember Oprah's words: “No is a complete sentence.” If you aren't already, start thinking about the word ‘no’ as self-care. I know there's someone reading this and thinking there's no way they'll not feel guilty for saying no. I know because I've been there, done that, got the t-shirt, washed it, folded it, donated it to Goodwill. The pressure on your time and talent isn't going to stop, so you might as well quiet the guilt and say no to things that are going to take resources you don't have to spare.

When I was in McNair and working on applying to grad schools, I had my heart set on going to the University of Pennsylvania. Then I took my GRE and my scores were okay—better than average, but not by much. I was devastated by my perceived failure, and I couldn't bring myself to apply to Penn. Six months later I got an acceptance letter from Columbia University and I didn't believe it was real. I blinked at it for an hour, and it took me a month to accept. I was convinced I wasn't smart enough to get into an Ivy League university—and that was just my first experience with the Impostor Syndrome!

While in grad school, taking care of my mental health was tough. I constantly felt like I had nothing important to say during class discussions, and couldn't figure out what I had in common with my classmates. As a McNair scholar, you could very well find yourself in a similar situation, where you're locked in the ivory tower of academia and feeling like you don't belong in grad school. *Tough* might be too light a word, so I'll leave you with the best coping mechanism I've found: talk to someone. Most schools have free or reduced rate counseling sessions for students. Use them. Join groups and talk to other students with similar racial/economic backgrounds. Reach out to your McNair cohort. Talk it out. No matter how unworthy you feel because of the Impostor Syndrome, or your guilt for leaving others behind, you're not alone and you deserve space and celebration for all your hard work.

Stay tuned: I hope to begin my doctoral studies in the fall of 2019!

## **A McNair Alumna Changes the World!**

**Kimaya Hudgins, M.A.**

I am an AP English and ESL Teacher at Winton Woods High School in Cincinnati, Ohio. I've been a teacher for five years—two in Atlanta, Georgia and three here in Cincinnati. At EMU my major was Cognitive Impairment: Mild to Moderate, and I had two minors: Teaching English to

Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and Secondary English. I completed my Master's in Instructional Design and Technology, at the University of Cincinnati, in April, 2017.



At my current school I am revising our English as a Second Language program. We have a recent influx of refugees from Nepal and Bhutan, as well as many Latinx students. I hope to help them become successful high school students. I also recently got engaged, and I'm getting married this July!

The McNair Scholars Program prepared me to write a thesis at the graduate level. I had a better understanding of the writing process than my peers. I also knew how to synthesize sources, a skill that was critical to my success, both as a graduate student and as an educator. The opportunity to work with a faculty mentor was invaluable, too. Having these experiences made me more competitive when it came to applying and succeeding in graduate school.

I advise all McNair Scholars to **STICK IT OUT** and **TAKE IT SERIOUSLY!!** It may seem tough and overwhelming, but the long-term benefits of McNair outweigh ANY alternative. You will grow as a thinker, reader, and writer. If you are feeling isolated, reach out to others around you, especially in your cohort.

I plan to apply to Xavier University and focus on a degree in Leadership Studies, or to apply to the Bright New Leaders for Ohio Program. The Bright Fellowship is a principal certification program that allows you earn an MBA from Ohio State University and become an Ohio school principal in one year.

My ultimate goal is to seek a doctorate at Xavier in the Leadership Studies Program. Thank you, EMU McNair!

*"Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it."*

---Marian Wright Edelman

**EMU McNAIR GRADUATE SCHOOL**  
**ADMISSIONS TICKER**  
*...the great news keeps on coming!!*

**Gwendolyn Dean**, Dr. Barbara Patrick, mentor  
**Wayne State University**, Master of Education,  
 Educational Leadership

**Alyssia Hence**, Dr. Celeste Hawkins, mentor  
**University of Michigan**, Master's of Social Work  
**Wayne State University**, Advanced Standing Master's  
 of Social Work

**Demarco Johnson**, Dr. Kimberly Barrett, mentor  
**Eastern Michigan University**, Master of Arts,  
 Criminology

**Ivan LeBron**, Dr. Yvette Colon, mentor  
**St. Louis University**, Master of Public Health in  
 Biosecurity & Disaster Preparedness

**Deborah Munganga**, Dr. Richard Stahler-Sholk, mentor  
**Pennsylvania State University**, Doctoral Program,  
 Political Science

**Nyambura Njee**, Dyann Logwood, M.A., mentor  
**New York University**, Master of Arts, African  
 American Studies

**Nayeli Sanchez**, Dr. Ulrich Reinhardt, mentor  
**The Ohio State University**, Master of Science,  
 Environmental and Natural Resources  
**Grand Valley State University**, Master of Science,  
 Biology, Aquatic Sciences  
**Central Michigan University**, Master of Science,  
 Biology

**Jesse Smith**, Dr. Steven Backues, mentor  
**The Ohio State University**, Doctoral Program,  
 Chemistry  
**Texas A & M**, Doctoral Program, Chemistry

**Yeliani Valdez**, Dr. Paul Leighton, mentor  
**The Ohio State University**, Doctoral Program, Social  
 Work  
**Wright State**, Master's of Social Work

**Sina Webster**, DR. Yvette Colon, mentor  
**Howard University**, Master of Science, Occupational  
 Therapy,  
**Georgia State University**, Master of Arts, Women and  
 Gender Studies

**Sina Webster**, (continued)  
**University of Illinois, Chicago**, Master of Science,  
 Occupational Therapy  
**DePaul University**, Master of Science, Occupational  
 Therapy

**Faith Williams**, Dr. Ashely Glassburn-Falzetti, mentor  
**University of Texas, Austin**, Master of Arts, Women  
 and Gender Studies,  
**Georgia State University**, Master of Arts, Women and  
 Gender Studies,  
**DePaul University**, Master of Arts, Women and  
 Gender Studies,

**Admission to Summer Research**  
**Opportunity Programs**

**Victoria Fields**,  
**The Ohio State University**, Sport Management  
**Robert Green**,  
**Rutgers University**, Engineering  
**Jaylen Taylor**,  
**Indiana University**, Chemistry  
**University of Michigan**, Chemistry



Coming in the April *Challenger*: the Interns travel to the University of Maryland and visit Washington, D.C.!