



# EMU McNair Challenger

Eastern Michigan University November 2020 Edition

Editor: Alex Druckmiller

Dr. Heather Neff, Ph.D.  
Program Director  
[hneff@emich.edu](mailto:hneff@emich.edu)

Dr. Kimberly Brown, Ph.D.  
Assistant Director  
[kbrown4@emich.edu](mailto:kbrown4@emich.edu)

**EMU McNair Staff**  
Cassidy Creech  
Graduate Assistant  
[ccreech1@emich.edu](mailto:ccreech1@emich.edu)

Alexa Druckmiller  
Graduate Assistant  
[adruckmi@emich.edu](mailto:adruckmi@emich.edu)

Tangeni Shikomba  
Graduate Assistant  
[mshikomb@emich.edu](mailto:mshikomb@emich.edu)

## From EMU to the World: EMU McNair Scholars open up about Graduate School

### Jaylen Taylor, McNair Scholar of the Year, 2020



Jaylen Taylor was the 2020 EMU McNair Scholar of the Year and winner of the 2020 McNair Research Award. Jaylen was an EMU Presidential Scholar and Honors College graduate in our Biochemistry program. Her research mentors were Dr.

Deborah Heyl-Clegg, Dr. Hedeel Evans and Dr. Jeffrey Guthrie. She is pursuing doctoral studies at The Ohio State University.

#### What's the name of your doctoral program and current graduate research project?

The Ohio State Biochemistry Ph.D. Program. I am currently rotating in Dr. Dennis Bong's lab. I am working on synthesizing peptides that are used to coordinate RNA systems as a means of developing analytical tools.

#### What were the hardest and easiest parts of your transition from undergrad to graduate studies?

**Easiest:** Moving from primarily passive learning (lectures) in undergraduate classes to majority active learning (discussions, presentations) in graduate school. I'm much more invested in the course material now because there's an actual foreseeable opportunity to use it in my research.

**Hardest:** Staying organized is more difficult! Because you have so much information to learn, hold on to, and master, your undergraduate study and organization methods aren't always as efficient as ones you'll need in graduate school. It's important to be flexible. Talk to others about their time management. Develop mentoring relationships with students who are further along in the program. Take your work/life balance seriously. My puppy Cora has been a great pal during this transition period!

#### Advice for current scholars?

Get in the habit of working hard. Get used to being efficient, organized, working well with others, and managing your time. The transition will be easier later if you master these skills now. I think that compared to other first-year students, my transition has been less emotionally strained because I was acclimated to particular expectations and the heavy workload before graduate

school. Being able to jump that hurdle has allowed me to focus on just doing the work, not wasting time trying to figure out how I was expected to get the work done. You aren't in graduate school to feel smart, you are in graduate school to learn and feel pride in the quality of your scholarship and hard work as a contribution to something greater.

### Alyssia Hence, McNair Scholar of the Year, 2018



Alyssia Hence was the 2018 McNair Scholar of the Year. She graduated with her Bachelor's of Social Work with high honors and completed her Master's of Social Work at the University of Michigan. She was named Student Social Worker of the Year. She published "Can you hear us

now? Engaging African American Youth Voices in Schools and Communities" under her mentor Dr. Celeste Hawkins. She also co-authored the peer-reviewed article "Unique effects of perceived neighborhood physical disorder and social cohesion on episodic memory and semantic fluency" with her mentor from the University of Michigan. She is currently a school social worker at Estabrook Elementary School in Ypsilanti.

#### Why did you choose Social Work as your undergraduate major?

When I entered EMU, I initially began my journey as an Accounting Major. Growing up, I had an older cousin who was a very successful Public Accountant whom I admired deeply. Therefore, as a young child I set out to follow her footsteps. However, in high school I took interest in a school-based public health program that would alter my life trajectory. During my sophomore year of high school, I was introduced to the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (TPIP), which was a program designed to teach students safe sex practices and healthy relationships. During the program, I became very attached to the program facilitator, a Clinical Social Worker whom we called Ms. Kristen.

Ms. Kristen often provided a safe place for students to feel comfortable sharing aspects of their lives they would normally conceal from the world. With Ms. Kristen, I felt completely comfortable sharing with an adult for the first time. Till this day I



# EMU McNair Challenger

still consider Ms. Kristen to be a mentor, and I am grateful for the positive impact she had on me in high school. This experience impacted my desire to give back to students who were like myself in need of a positive adult who could make a difference in their lives. I later became a Peer Educator for TPIP. In my role as Peer Educator I co-facilitated lessons with peers that provided me teaching, public speaking, and leadership experience. Later in college, I found myself cherishing and longing for the experience I had in TPIP.

Though I was excelling academically and professionally as a business student during my first two years of college, in the back of my mind I still thought about what my life would be if I pursued social work. One day I attended a meeting with the EMU Association of Black Social Workers (ABSW) and shared with the organization how I was pondering changing majors. After speaking, the president of ABSW stated that I did not sound like an Accounting major, but rather like a Social Work major. In that moment, I felt a sense of relief and that my decision to change majors was solidified. I then marched to Dave Evoy's office, a social work advisor, and from that moment on I began to feel like I was following my life's true purpose!

## What challenges did you face transitioning from EMU to Michigan for graduate school?

The biggest challenge I faced transitioning from EMU to the University of Michigan for graduate school was adjusting to not having McNair in footsteps' reach. I did not realize how much I relied on McNair for emotional, academic, and even financial support at times. McNair was always my listening ear and safe place when I needed it. McNair was ready and willing to problem solve with me, especially when I thought about completing my EMU Honors Thesis. When I needed a job to make extra money, McNair worked its magic to get me a job at Halle Library. McNair always pushed me to believe in myself and to try my best, even when I didn't feel I had much more to give.

Leaving all those wonderful things about the program behind was very hard. I almost thought about not attending U of M due to financial restraints. However, McNair encouraged me to attend anyway, trusting that U of M would open many doors for me. At first I felt very alone and suffered from Impostor Syndrome. Yet, I still kept in touch with McNair and other

EMU faculty that kept me pushing forward despite my self-doubt and negativity, and in 12 short months I completed my graduate program!

## What are graduate school classes REALLY like?

Graduate classes didn't feel especially challenging after EMU! However, my classes were very team oriented. I found most of my graduate instructors to be very flexible, creative, and relaxed in their approach with students. I had a few of my professors' personal phone numbers to text about assignments or questions. Professors were also very willing to meet during office hours. I even attended an end of the semester party for my Social Work Groups class where we had fake mimosas! I will never forget that moment because I always perceived U of M to be an intense, cold, and intimidating place. Maybe for other majors, but certainly not social work.

## What are you doing these days?

Today, I serve as a Special Education School Social Worker for Ypsilanti Community Schools. I serve children in grades 2 through 5, teaching students social skills, how to better manage complex emotions, and calming down strategies. I love my job! In my spare time I enjoy practicing yoga, going on long walks, reading, and spending time with friends when I can. Since entering the workforce, I've experienced many moments of gratitude. Looking back at who I was during my time at EMU and U of M, I was in a constant state of hustle and bustle. I took many leaps of faith to be where I am today, starting with my decision to leave Detroit for EMU. I am eternally grateful for McNair and other faculty I have been fortunate to meet along the way.

## Victoria Fields, McNair Scholar of the Year, 2019

*Victoria was an EMU Honors College graduate in Communication and Sport Management. Her research mentor was Dr. Dennis O'Grady. She is pursuing her Master's in Communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*



## What's the name of your current grad research project?

My program is the Department of Communication at the University of Illinois. Currently, I am a part of a research team where we are analyzing the assessment of micro-aggression workshops in our Public Speaking classes. This project has received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to collect focus group data. In addition, I am using a rhetorical discourse analysis to examine Civil Rights and Women's Suffrage activist, Mary Church Terrell's speech, "What It Means to Be Colored in the U.S Capitol."

### Connect with us!

Twitter: @McNairEmu Instagram: @emumcnair  
Facebook: EMU McNair Scholars Program

### Important Info!

Thanksgiving break: Nov. 23- Nov. 29 Fall semester ends Dec. 18



# EMU McNair Challenger

This research was accepted for presentation at the 2020 National Communication Association Conference and is in the process of being submitted for publication.

I am also working with my former research advisor, Dr. Chris Knoester, from my 2018 Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP) at The Ohio State University. We are working on publishing a manuscript highlighting public attitudes towards transgender and non-binary individuals in sport competitions. Dr. Knoester and I co-authored a peer-reviewed article in 2019, titled, "Mother-child engagement in sports and outdoor activities: Intensive mothering, purposive leisure, and implications for health and relationship closeness" in the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.

I am also the lead author for a book chapter proposal, which focuses on using pedagogy to bridge the digital divide for marginalized students during the COVID-19 Pandemic and beyond. In this chapter, we argue that pedagogical practices must shift to accommodate the new challenges faced by our marginalized students.

### Best part of graduate studies?

For me, the best part of graduate studies is teaching. I am very grateful that I still get to teach my students in the midst of a global pandemic and a heavy year. Although teaching virtually is different, I still enjoy seeing my students grow, learn, and understand the materials.

### Advice for current scholars?

Be yourself, love yourself, and *trust* yourself! You made it here for a reason, so keep going!!! Also, make connections and keep up with your connections in the years to come!

## Stokes Jones Scholarship Recipients!

The Stokes Jones Scholarships are funded by a generous donation from Dr. Toni Stokes Jones, Emerita Professor of Education and namesake of the McNair Stokes Jones award, conferred annually on a faculty or staff member who has provided special support to our students. Congratulations to Jacklyn Staffeld, Lisbette Zavala, and Karin Hartmeier!

*Jacklyn Staffeld, Psychology and Criminology  
EMU Honors College*

### Describe an experience that led to your future goals.

Having a professor who was previously incarcerated. While I had already had interest in criminology, it wasn't until then that I truly understood that criminals sometimes lack resources or have a psychological disorder that inhibits their understanding of right and wrong. My future goal is to create a program to provide previously incarcerated people with resources to be successful in

their reintegration into society.

### What's an experience you've had that makes you unique?

In my first year of high school, I couldn't have cared less about my academics. I was far too anxious and depressed and angry at the world to feel as though I could make anything of myself -- I didn't think there was anything beyond that darkness. That was when I finally met the counselor I have been working with for the last five years. It was the first and only time that someone spoke to me with so much peace and calmness to say, "You have to change. And you can."

It was then that I truly challenged my learned helplessness. I think that this experience taught me that no matter how difficult things can be, there is always a way out, as long as you are willing to ask for help and to work as hard as you may need to.

### What are you most grateful for right now, even in the midst of a pandemic?

I would say I am most thankful for the people who have supported me during this time. When I lost my job in March, the government provided me with unemployment pay. When I could no longer stay on campus, friends let me couch hop until I had a good place to stay. THANK YOU!!

*Lisbette Zavala, Social Work*

### Describe an experience that led to your future goals.

Surviving adolescence! It's an extremely confusing and stressful point in one's life, and I'd like to work in a secondary-education environment assisting other adolescents, no matter what role I end up doing. I am currently leaning toward school social worker.

### What's an experience you've had that makes you unique?

An experience that makes me unique is growing up in a People of Color (POC)-dominated school environment for most of my life. When I moved to New Jersey in 2010, the schools I attended were predominately white. My cousin, a friend, and I were the only Latinx kids in the school. When I went to middle school for the first half of the semester, I recall seeing only one Black student. When I came back here, there was so much beautiful and rich diversity! I've learned so much and I'm so grateful to live here. It's truly sad that so few kids have that same experience with the real world.

### What are you most grateful for right now, even in the midst of a pandemic?

I am most grateful for mindfulness. We are living through extremely stressful and unpredictable times. At the end of the day, I remind myself to breathe. To meditate. To be aware of the universe and forces at work. I am grateful for the ability to simply remain positive!



# EMU McNair Challenger

*Karin Hartmaier, International Business  
EMU Honors College*

### **Describe an experience that led to your future goals.**

Moving to Germany after 5th grade was definitely an experience that changed my life and helped evolve my worldview to what it is today. I've been lucky enough to have traveled and seen some of the many different parts of the world, which made me naturally gravitate toward my International Business major. I have so many different passions and interests, which initially made it difficult for me to decide on a major, but I believe the path I'm on right now will open many doors and help me make the greatest difference in the world.

### **What's an experience you've had that makes you unique?**

I grew up in a trilingual household with a Mexican mother and German father. I've also never lived in the same city for more than 4 years! I guess my entire upbringing is unconventional and most of the people in my life also have unique backgrounds. There's never a boring day in my life!

### **What are you most grateful for right now, even in the midst of a pandemic?**

I'm definitely most grateful for my family. Throughout every struggle and move, my parents and my younger sister have been with me and supported me through everything. More often than not, other relatives were usually thousands of miles away, so we always really only had each other to rely on. The pandemic has actually brought us closer than ever before, which has been amazing amidst all this uncertainty.

## McNair Stays Safe while Staying Connected

By Tangeni Shikomba, Graduate Assistant

With everyone turning to remote communication due to the pandemic, "**Do Your Part. #BeCyberSmart**" has never been more important than it is today!

### **Do's**

- Accept upgrades and keep your applications up to date
- **Back up your data** as frequently as possible! This is the only way to get your files back in the event of a ransomware attack
- If you're not using an app, **sign off!**
- **Turn off Bluetooth** unless you're using it. It just adds another means for hackers could to invade your device
- Get Cyber Security education and training
- Beware of Phishing Attacks
- Follow the **#BeCyberSmart** handle on twitter and stay informed

### **Don'ts**

- DON'T leave Bluetooth on! Avoid getting bluejacked!
- DON'T purchase a device that requires no passcode or has the passcode 0000. Find a secure alternative
- **Avoid pop-ups**, unknown emails, and links
- DON'T connect to **unsecured Wi-Fi**
- DON'T give away your **confidential information**
- DON'T **recycle passwords** between different accounts
- Beware of malicious applications and websites

## McNair Hangouts!

Finding time to hang with friends can be difficult in a pandemic. So McNair offered Hangouts! Each week, people who are interested in different hobbies or activities can get together and talk about or do whatever they're interested in. Below is the calendar of times that different groups meet.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Movie Hangout at 7	Knitting/Crochet Hangout at 4 Movie Hangout at 7:30	Hair Hangout at 3 Cooking Hangout at 4			Music Hangout at 7 Series Hangout at 8