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Introduction

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Introduction

Dr. Heather Neff, Ph.D.

Director, EMU McNair Scholars Program

Professor of English

Michigan Distinguished Professor

Even as the demand for highly trained professionals in the American workplace grows, we find that access to higher education becomes steadily more challenging for the majority of Americans. The McNair Scholars Program was created by Congress to assist students from first-generation and underrepresented homes in obtaining Bachelor's degrees and gaining admission to Master's and Doctoral programs. Our hope is that the next generation of university faculty, scholars and researchers will better reflect the wide diversity of race, gender and economic status of the American population.

Eastern Michigan University was first selected by the federal Department of Education to host a Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program in 2007. Over the past eight years, one hundred and fifteen deserving students have received McNair services, resulting in the publication of over seventy scholarly articles in the Eastern Michigan University *McNair Scholars Research Journal*. These articles reflect advanced research in the Life Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities and Technology, and demonstrate the intense intellectual commitment of our participants to advanced studies in their field. Supported by caring faculty, EMU McNair Scholars devise, carry out and present research at Eastern Michigan's prestigious Undergraduate Symposium, the EMU McNair Research Colloquium, national McNair conferences, and, indeed, at professional conferences in their academic disciplines. McNair research experiences have led to opportunities for students to co-author articles with their faculty mentors in refereed scholarly journals, and have launched academic careers leading to the doctoral degree.

The thirty-five students in EMU McNair, competitively admitted at the beginning of their sophomore year, engage in a three-year developmental program designed to strengthen their academic skills and address their personal needs. With training in

academic writing, research ethics, financial literacy, and self-presentation, our students are well prepared for the rigors of graduate study. The nine articles published in this volume, examining topics such as homelessness in college populations, DNA breaks as the origin of some forms of cancer, the place of asexual individuals in queer communities, and cultural differences in the sexual practices of immigrant and non-immigrant women from the Dominican Republic, mirror topics of importance to the world in which we live. Our students' research is widely read; to date, the articles published in the first seven volumes of the EMU *McNair Scholars Research Journal* have been electronically downloaded over 93,000 times (<http://commons.emich.edu/mcnair/>).

I wish to extend my deepest thanks to the administrators, faculty and staff who have contributed to the success of our program, including Dr. Susan Martin, Dr. Kim Schatzel, Dr. James Carroll, Dr. Jeffrey Kentor, Dr. Mary Ramsey, Dr. Rebecca Sipe, Dr. Arnold Fleishmann, Dr. Ellen Koch, Thomas Venner, Dr. Kate Mehuron, Dr. Sarah Huyvaert, Julia Nims, Keith Jason, Caryn Charter, Donelle Goerlitz, Claresta Davis, Jennifer Janicek, Gregg Costanzo, Dr. Toni Stokes-Jones, and Marcus Adams. We owe much of our success to your continued kindness and generosity.

Most importantly, thank you to the faculty mentors who worked with our students to produce the articles published in this volume: Dr. Eric Acton, Dr. Ernest Behringer, Dr. Marcia Bombyk, Dr. Ramona Caponegro, Dr. Anne Casper, Dr. Yvette Colón, Dr. Maria Milletti, Dr. Janet Okagbue-Reaves, and Dr. Carol Schlagheck.

The Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program is named for Dr. Ronald McNair, a physicist and astronaut. The EMU McNair Program annually serves thirty-five high-achieving sophomores, juniors and seniors from first-generation, low income or under-represented groups (African American, Native American, Hispanic or Alaskan Native / Pacific Islander). The program prepares its participants for admission to graduate programs and the successful completion of doctoral studies.

Congratulations to the nine McNair Scholars published in this journal. We are exceedingly proud of you!

Dr. Heather Neff, Ph.D.

Dr. Sonia Chawla, Ph.D.

EMU Research Compliance Officer

In my position as the EMU Research Compliance Officer, I'm often asked about the mechanics of research and the regulations governing research. However, I'm never asked about the importance of research. Perhaps it seems obvious, at least to those who do research. But in these times of science denialism, reduced funding for basic research, and the relative lack of incentive for humanities research, the importance of research is not trivial.

Research is an extension of our humanity. It is how we learn about the world around us and about our place within the world. Research is the ultimate tool for expanding the mind and improving our lives, one discovery at a time. Without a doubt, research can be difficult, long, and painstaking work. It requires a level of meticulousness and dedication that, quite frankly, very few people are capable of. But the rewards are immense. You discover something new. You join the ranks of Archimedes, Newton, Einstein, and Dr. Ronald McNair, among others. To me, the most amazing thing about doing research is that for a single moment in time, right after analyzing and interpreting your data, you are the only person in the entire world who knows one small but very special new thing. Imagine that. When you do research, you are the only person out of the seven billion who inhabit this earth who knows what you know. You are more unique than one in a million – you are one in seven billion. And you get to share that knowledge with everyone else.

The research in this volume is the documentation of the hard work and dedication of nine young scholars and represents the achievements and goals of all the students in EMU's McNair Scholars Program and their mentors. In this journal, these nine scholars are giving up their one in seven billion status to share their new knowledge. They are contributing to our collective understanding of ourselves and our world. They have done their part to expand our minds and improve our lives, one discovery at a time.

Dr. Sonia Chawla, Ph.D.