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## Introduction

Heather Neff

*Eastern Michigan University, hneff@emich.edu*

Anthony E. Sparkling

*Purdue University, asparkli@purdue.edu*

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## Introduction

Dr. Heather Neff, Ph.D.

The 2017-18 academic year marked the start of the third round of funding for the Eastern Michigan University McNair Scholars Program. Over the past eleven years EMU McNair has grown in size — we now serve 36 students — and our success can be measured not only in the achievements of our undergraduates, but in the number of our scholars that have gone on to attain the doctoral degree. One of our alumni, Dr. Anthony Sparkling, shares his journey from EMU to a tenure-track position at Purdue University, below. Other McNair alumni, including Dr. Dara Walker and Dr. Julie Krupa, have accepted post-doctoral positions at Pennsylvania State University and Michigan State University, respectively. We heartily congratulate them on their many achievements.

The McNair program is designed to support our students, who come from first-generation and underrepresented backgrounds, in succeeding in graduate studies. We employ high-impact practices such as faculty-mentored research, collaborative projects, holistic advising and the instruction of life skills to prepare our participants for the rigors of graduate studies. Being a McNair Scholar also translates to close friendships with peers who share a thirst for knowledge and a commitment to personal advancement. Our students remain close as they navigate graduate studies in institutions across our nation and go on to professional careers. McNair refines and refocuses the undergraduate experience from “getting a degree” to a gateway to an invigorating and promising intellectual future.

Our current doctoral students represent the fields of biochemistry, genetics, psychology, social work, criminology, rhetoric and linguistics. Research shows that students from the McNair population typically demonstrate a selfless dedication to helping those with less privilege, thus reforming our culture through their research, teaching activities and professional lives.

Volume 11 of the EMU *McNair Scholars Research Journal* includes a number of articles addressing the health and

welfare of our nation, including studies on the links between eating disorders and attachment anxiety in adolescents, the underuse of mental health services by African American college students, and the importance of offering targeted support to veterans returning to higher education. Other research in this volume examines the relationship between prescription trends and the current opioid crisis, the effect of anxiety on emotional perception, and addiction issues in our growing elderly population. Such research is the foundation of our slogan: *The future is McNair!*

I wish to extend my deepest thanks to the administrators, faculty and staff whose support contributes to the success of EMU McNair, including Dr. James Smith, Dr. Rhonda Longworth, Dr. Michael Tew, Dr. Toni Stokes-Jones, Dr. Mary Ramsey, Dr. Arnold Fleishmann, Dr. Ellen Koch, Dr. Sarah Huyvaert, Dr. Ethriam Brammer, Julia Nims, LaMarcus Howard, Eric Reed, Veronica Konglim, Micala Evans-Cochran, Jennifer Janicek and the EMU Student Government. We owe much of our success to your continued kindness and generosity.

EMU McNair Scholars thrive because of the tireless support and encouragement of their faculty mentors, who dedicate many hours, without remuneration, to assisting them on their academic journey. Our faculty mentors are role models, success coaches, academic guides and friends — and it should come as no surprise that several were, themselves, McNair Scholars during their undergraduate years!

The faculty who worked with our students to produce the articles published in this volume include Dr. Chong Man Chow, Dr. Charles Graham, Dr. Deborah Heyl-Clegg, Dr. Ellen Koch, Dr. Dennis O’Grady, Dr. Karen Saules, Dr. Jeffrey Schulz, Dr. Angela Staples, Dr. MacArthur Stewart and Dr. Silvia von Kluge.

The Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program is named for the late Dr. Ronald McNair, a physicist and astronaut. The EMU McNair Program annually serves thirty-six 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 ten McNair Scholars published in Volume 11 of the *McNair Scholars Research Journal*. We are exceedingly proud of you!

Dr. Heather Neff, Ph.D.  
Director, Eastern Michigan University  
McNair Scholars Program  
Professor of English



Dr. Anthony Sparkling, Ph.D.

I was extremely humbled, yet honored to receive the request from Dr. Heather Neff to contribute this introduction to the EMU *McNair Scholars Research Journal*. As an Eastern Michigan University McNair Scholar and African American male, I continue to stay on the road less traveled for a reason. All of us experience a tremendous amount of excitement and anticipation when we venture through new doors. Our future as leaders within academia requires boldness, courage, kindness, and humility to effectively serve and motivate others. The McNair Scholars Program is designed to help its members to meet this challenge, and certainly upheld its mission in my journey.

We often find ourselves working tenaciously towards our goals, but never stop to embrace the milestones along the way. I have begun to take stock of milestones in my life. As the youngest of my siblings and only one to earn a postsecondary degree, the stage was set for many “firsts.” I began my university studies in 1993 but left school to complete an electrical apprenticeship and obtain my master electrical license. Over the following years I spent countless hours training and mentoring individuals in the construction industry. Having managed construction projects as large as \$120 million, this single milestone opened a door to a wealth of practical and professional experience that will forever remain part of my life.

In 2007 I matriculated at Eastern Michigan University (EMU), determined to complete my Bachelor’s degree in Construction

Management. I was accepted into the EMU McNair Scholars Program, where I gained exposure to the rigors of graduate studies while receiving guidance on how to conduct scholarly research. The McNair Program afforded me the opportunity to experience the dissemination of my research through conferences, publication, and networking with others in the academic community. McNair does all of this while offering direct feedback on our writing, presentations, and building confidence in our ability to continue on to graduate school.

As a graduate student at Michigan State University (MSU) I continued to reach many key milestones. The results from my master's research evolved into a publication in a top journal in our field, which is uncommon for early academics. I was awarded a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship to support my doctoral studies. This fellowship encourages interdisciplinary research while also emphasizing work with broader societal impact. I was the first student to receive this fellowship in MSU's School of Planning, Design, and Construction, an achievement recognized by the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

While showcasing my scholarly research at the 2017 Transportation Research Board (TRB) Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., a prominent academic in our field encouraged me to apply to one of the standing committees. This organization is a unit of the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, a group of "private, nonprofit institutions that provide expert advice on some of the most pressing challenges facing the nation and the world." Surprisingly, I was offered both membership and a seat on one of the standing committees. My responsibilities included a three-year commitment, attendance at the annual meetings in Washington, D.C., reviewing journal papers, organizing and moderating sessions and helping to initiate new research agendas. As a scholar, this experience provided me an extraordinary opportunity to expand my academic knowledge, network and influence.

In June of 2018 I earned my Ph.D. in Planning, Design, and Construction and accepted a tenure-track Assistant Professor

position at Purdue University. I hope that my milestones will inspire today's McNair scholars to embrace the unique opportunities offered by EMU McNair as a catalyst to a meaningful future. Take a moment to relish each milestone you reach, and remember that no matter how great the challenges, the reward is much greater. *Stay the course!* Always remember to reach back with gratitude and acknowledge those who have paved your way. My journey would have been nearly impossible without the support and encouragement of many academics, colleagues, friends, family and programs such as McNair. As you embark upon your journey, know that your contribution to this journal is an invaluable milestone. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

Dr. Anthony Sparkling, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Construction Management,  
Purdue University  
Eastern Michigan University McNair Scholar,  
Class of 2011

