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A NOTE FROM DR. ROGER HARO, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

If you are reading this newsletter, you are either a McNair/FYRE supporter or an interested party open to learning about our program’s evidence of achievement, and maybe one to be persuaded to enlist as another supporter of success. These two programs are at the heart of what makes UW-L a university that champions inclusive excellence. These two words are not platitudes, easily voiced at convenient opportunities without action; no, they are words staking out commitments to vision, collaboration, interdisciplinary endeavor, and hard work by all that pick up their challenge.

Every year, McNair Scholars at higher education institutions across the country take a moment to remember when Dr. Ronald E. McNair, our program’s namesake, was lost during the explosion of the NASA Space Shuttle orbiter Challenger in 1986. Later, in 1989 the US Congress recognized his commitments and service as an underrepresented role model by establishing the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program under the U.S. Department of Education’s TRIO suite through the Higher Education Act. I hope this newsletter provides convincing evidence that the UW-L McNair Scholars Program and its affiliate program, the First Year Research Exposure (FYRE) program, deserve continued support, not only in monetary resources but also in commitments from students, faculty, and staff. We are proud of our Scholars, their faculty mentors, and the university employees that make these programs successful by negotiating small acts of support every day. These programs could not persist or succeed without the support of folks from the College of Science and Health, physical operations, the business office, student life, academic affairs, and community support from the Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center. I am encouraged every day by knowing we support those who shoot for the stars!

Dr. Ronald McNair

Newsletter written & designed by Maggie Weitzman

Jessica Thill
Program Coordinator

Maggie Weitzman
McNair Scholars Graduate Assistant

TC Yang
FYRE Graduate Assistant
One of the hallmarks of the McNair Scholars Program is to send our students to multiple nationwide events. In doing so, the Scholars are able to:

✓ Present their research at conferences;
✓ Network with employers and university faculty at grad school fairs;
✓ Check out facilities & meet prospective graduate faculty during campus visits;
✓ Attend intensive graduate school preparation workshops …

... All while meeting other McNair students and faculty from across the country!

Read on to find out what the Scholars have to say about their trips so far this summer and fall.
Despite the Retreat being held at a premier getaway location in the Wisconsin Dells, I surprisingly walked away with more information on graduate school applications and admissions than I was bartering to collect. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised about it because the workshop speaker, Don Asher, knows the ins and outs of everything that is even remotely related to the grad school selection process. I feel confident in saying that by going to this Retreat, my knowledge on grad school essays and personal statements doubled, even after having spent an entire summer going through my McNair workshops. Everything that was covered – from where I should apply to everywhere, to how I should respond and weigh my funding packages – was described in such specific detail that my worry for applying to graduate school has dramatically decreased.

The retreat itinerary flowed well from one workshop to the next, and the Chula Vista staff did a phenomenal job of preparing every meal. Being able to speak with current graduate students was also a huge benefit for everyone in attendance, as Scholars were able to get more insight into particular behaviors and norms within graduate school culture, as well likely meet a graduate student who’s going to one of your top grad school or program choices.

I can’t stress enough about how much confidence this conference instills in a Scholar for what may be one of the scariest and toughest decisions in their academic career.

At the McNair Retreat, Don Asher spoke for hours on end, but it was enlightening. I learned a lot about the calendar of events and what to expect about the application process. The thing that stuck out most was “don’t self-select out” when choosing schools to apply to. I do sometimes think that a school is too prestigious, or that I’m not cut out for that line of work. So, I’ve tried to take this advice to heart while applying – because how can I ever get in to a school if I don’t try?

Another thing I have tried to get past is the “imposter syndrome,” which Don Asher explained is the feeling all grad students get when they start their studies. They think, “Why am I here, they are going to find out I am a loser and I’ll get kicked out of grad school?” Asher explains that everyone feels like this at least once, and we need to recognize it and push past it. Having experienced this myself before I knew there was a name for it, hearing him talk about it like it was no big deal was very liberating.

The McNair Retreat really got me motivated to add more grad schools to my grad list. It also helped me get over some anxieties about the process and made me connect better with the other people that attended. If you other Scholars are at all on the fence about attending events with other McNair students, I suggest you get off the fence!
Scholars Alex Clussman, Michael Fuerte, Maricruz Sanchez, and Sarah Zahirudin presented their McNair research posters at the Conference, and they had some great things to say about the rest of the event too!

“A GRAD SCHOOL FAIR, A GRAD student panel, oral student presentations, research poster displays, powerful keynote speakers, a karaoke competition, a dance floor, and the most epic school roll call in history makes this easily one of the most enjoyable and informative conferences I’ve ever attended. Ideas flowed like the waters at this resort, and I believe everyone that went to this conference left with a more lucid understanding of what to do next with their undergraduate experience.”

— Michael

“I presented a poster of a research project I am assisting Dr. Ploeger-Lyons in the Communication Studies field. The goal of her study is to explore the ways in which one’s retirement may affect one’s own identity and his or her spouse’s identity and experiences. In doing so, I was able to convey the study in an academic venue where I received questions and feedback from students and faculty from varying disciplines and universities. It was an exhilarating experience that confirmed my penchant for research.”

— Maricruz

“One part of the Conference I connected with most was the introduction by Carl McNair, the brother of Dr. Ronald McNair. In his speech, he emphasized that overcoming challenges and struggles are significant aspects of a person’s journey. A few individuals from the audience got up and spoke about their experiences and personal journeys; I also was one of the speakers. We all defined our challenges differently, but everyone in that room came together to realize that while our stories are different, we are on the same path towards success through the McNair Scholars Program.”

— Sarah
Today, the U.S. uses 4.5 billion gallons of fuel in transporting agriculture every year. Our current method of feeding people is unsustainable. A growing world population, with the vast amounts of pesticides and energy required for conventional farming to feed them, is bound to have repercussions. We must rethink our crops: community farms in urban settings, along with rooftop gardens and aquaponic operations, are transforming most urbanized cities by reclaiming once dilapidated warehouses and converting them into greenhouses.

Growing Power is an urban agriculture organization founded in Milwaukee by Will Allen. Since its beginning, their mission has been to provide safe, clean, and organic local food to their community. Growing Power has transformed the well-being of communities by proving a sustainable food system while remaining a non-profit organization offering hands-on-training, on-the-ground demonstration, outreach, and assistance. Through this work, Allen has been changing the lives of teenagers and ex-convicts alike. By empowering the peoples of a community, Allen has radically altered the mentality of what can be produced in limited urban space. One aspect of their program is the use of vertical farming, which can transform one outdoor acre to the equivalent of up to six acres, abolishing the need to transport produce thousands of miles. The crops thus become available to urban dwellers sooner, reducing spoilage of crops dramatically.

Will Allen knows that all urban agriculture operations are based on the soil. It is the soil that makes it possible to provide a sustainable growing environment. The soil comes from the homemade compost that is started with food scraps and non-edible plant waste. Growing Power has provided a secure food supply, improving the economic viability and making the crops more affordable while at the same time making great strides toward solving one of the gravest world environmental crises facing us today.

Read more about Will Allen & Growing Power! www.growingpower.org
The **DOs** and **DON'Ts** of Research Poster Presentations

**DO ...**

**Use COLOR and include plenty of LARGE FIGURES**
This not only attracts people to your poster with visual interest, but also helps demonstrate concepts and lessen the impact of the technical research text.

**Use the poster as a reference to your prepared speech**
If you’ve rehearsed a 1 or 2-minute overview of your project, you’ll be able to convey the ideas quickly to the audience. Rather than reading directly from your poster, use it as a reference by pointing to the information as you discuss it.

**Speak clearly, enunciate, and SLOW DOWN!**
This demonstrates your control of the presentation and gives your audience time to process the info.

**Maintain eye contact and positive body language**
By not spending too much time staring at the poster or slouching over (or checking your phone!), you will display confidence and help keep your audience’s interest.

**DON'T ...**

**Use a tiny text size to maximize the amount of content you can fit**
Knowing that people only have a few minutes to look at your poster, avoid long sentences and use bullet points to shorten concepts to make it easy to quickly understand. Text should be brief yet informative, and readable from a few feet away.

**Cramp & clutter your poster by leaving out any “breathing room” between objects**
Crowded and overly dense content can discourage the audience from checking out your poster – it may seem too complex and lengthy to easily grasp. Include enough blank areas to space items out so they can “breathe.”

**Use technical jargon with audience**
Remember that not everyone at the conference is an expert in your field! Explain your research in more familiar terms when talking with the audience, and refer them to the relevant sections of the poster to find the more technical details.

**Take questions, suggestions, or criticism too personally**
When your audience provides feedback such as possible improvements or suggestions for future work, be open up for discussion so you can better explain your point and also get new ideas from the audience.
“Once of the sessions I attended was the information jackpot for me. Dr. Ryan Bouchard, Ed.D. recently received his doctorate and presented his dissertation to us: “What’s all the Hype about the Dean of Students Position? Focus on Leadership.” He now serves as Edgewood College’s Associate Dean of Students and Director of Residence Life. This talk was especially interesting and helpful for me because he focused on the design and implementation of his qualitative research in the higher education setting. I was pleasantly surprised to hear him reiterate a lot of the direction that I have received from Dr. Bakkum to apply to my research.”  — Amanda, planning to pursue Student Affairs Administration in graduate school

“This Symposium allowed me to see student from across the country that were doing research and had the same ambitions as me, and to explore different graduate programs at the grad school fair. What benefitted me the most at the grad school fair was learning about summer internships and research opportunities offered at each school. This opened the door for me to possibly do research at a different institution and explore different programs in person to really ask deeper questions and get a different aspect of the program outside of their website. I spoke mostly with the Drexel representative and Lund University about their programs. Other than answering the inquiries I had about a particular program, I was analyzing how the representative talked about their program, how knowledgeable they were in answering my questions, and the vibe they gave off. For the most part, Drexel and Lund universities were very knowledgeable and able to answer my questions well with details. I left my resume with most of the schools in hopes that they would remember me a little bit more after I left.”  — Kingsley, planning to pursue Public Health in graduate school

“For the most part, my knowledge on Public Health programs has come from familiarizing myself with program websites. However, I wanted to interact with recruiters and representatives of various programs in person to really ask deeper questions and get a different aspect of the program outside of their website. I spoke mostly with the Drexel representative and Lund University about their programs. Other than answering the inquiries I had about a particular program, I was analyzing how the representative talked about their program, how knowledgeable they were in answering my questions, and the vibe they gave off. For the most part, Drexel and Lund universities were very knowledgeable and able to answer my questions well with details. I left my resume with most of the schools in hopes that they would remember me a little bit more after I left.”  — Sarah, planning to pursue Public Health in graduate school

“Only being a junior and not heading to graduate school until Fall 2017, I don’t have to crunch and worry about making a final decision on where to go to graduate school yet. However, I wanted to attend this fair to get an idea of what is out there as well as make connections to schools early on. And I was able to connect with various institutions all over the world! I started by talking to Drexel University in Philadelphia simply because it was the first school that I saw with a Public Health graduate program. I ended up loving the school, making a great connection with the admissions counselor, and getting information on summer research programs. I was also able to talk with two international universities, Lund University in Sweden and University of Dublin in Ireland. The admissions representative from Lund University and I communicated after the graduate fair, and they were able to put me on a list of interested students, along with noting when the university should be looking for my application. I now feel comfortable attending future events and having productive conversations with graduate schools. Thanks McNair!”  — Kandyce, planning to pursue Public Health in graduate school
McNair Scholars Program, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

2014 - 2015

MEET THE PROGRAM: NEW SCHOLARS

So far this year, we have welcomed 9 new Scholars into the program. Please join us in getting to know them!

Five of the new Scholars met at the December 2014 New Scholar Orientation to get their official program introduction.

The nine new Scholars began meeting in January 2015 for our Research Seminar Series.

We discuss topics such as formulating a research hypothesis, exploring career options for PhD holders, practicing interview skills, and learning professional communication skills within academia.

Left to right: Dylan Montoure, Scott Barrera, Stephany Anzueto, Cassandra Philippon, Gaokhia Yang

Left to right: Travis Harrison, Michael Gonzales, Ebony Phillips, Dylan Montoure

Scott Barrera (left) and Gaokhia Yang (right)

Left group: Cassandra Philippon, Scott Barrera, Gaokhia Yang, Stephany Anzueto

Right group: Travis Harrison, Michael Gonzales, Ebony Phillips, Dylan Montoure

At the podium: Jessica Thill
I grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where I graduated from Riverside University High school. My research interests involve further exploring the inequalities of Hispanic students in the education system. Using the findings from conducting my quantitative research project, I hope to discover and learn from this underrepresented group some specific strategies and to promote awareness to help this group move forward. This past semester, I had the opportunity to intern with the La Crosse County Human Services working hands on with the Data Integration team. As the Business Analyst intern my duties varied from collecting data, to cleaning the data and performing statistical analyses. Some of my responsibilities also included creating graphs and PowerPoint presentation slides for monthly upcoming Data Integration Team meetings.

I am a first generation college student with two hard working parents who impressed upon my siblings and me to focus completely on our studies and to take advantages of the opportunities they never had. By participating in McNair, I hope to gain the specific tools needed to pursue my PhD in Sociology in the future. Pursuing a PhD will help me advance my career in an environment that would give me the opportunity to work hands on with other students that plan on pursuing a degree.

I graduated from Badger High School in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin with high honors and decided to further my education by attending University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. I entered college declaring a major in Psychology and Spanish. My first year I became extremely involved on-campus by joining multiple organizations and volunteering. I was an active member of the Latin American Student Organization and Broadening Horizons, a social justice organization. I volunteered at the Parenting Place which helped to facilitate and manage better connections between parents and their children. My second year I became the President of the Latin American Student Organization and began to work at the Recreational Center. During my second semester I studied abroad in Costa Rica where I studied for the next six months. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life where I was able to study Spanish extensively and immerse myself into another culture. During my third year I have taken on the position of being a Resident Assistant in the Global Village of Reuter Hall.

I plan to graduate with a double major in Psychology and Spanish and pursue a PhD in Counseling Psychology. The end career goal would be a Child Psychologist. I hope to combine the aspects of counseling psychology and pharmacology in order to have a more effective and more helpful treatment for a patient.

I was born in Waukegan Illinois, the second of three children. Our family moved to the great state of Wisconsin when I was 9 years old. My older sister Colette was the first of us to graduate from a 4 year university, showing my younger brother and me that we were capable of the same if not more. My parents Keith and Theresa Bell were the most important contributors in my pursuit toward my life goals. I expect to one day earn my Ph.D. as well as co-own and manage a media company with my siblings, although they are not yet aware of these plans. These goals are important to me because I recognize how media is advancing and I believe there is great potential in utilizing emerging technology to create positive change in disadvantaged communities. If I can place myself in a better position to spread messages of love, triumph, and family by educating myself to the highest degree, then that’s what I plan to do.

A preacher’s kid at heart, I’ve learned to see hope and opportunity through the toughest of times. Now I must admit, my allegiance to the Chicago Cubs has also taught me a thing or two about holding on to hope. Nonetheless I enjoy the time I’m spending now as a college student, sports enthusiast, social activist, and all of the madness in between. I see life as a blessing and I intend to make the very most of it.
DYLAN MONTOURE
Major: Biology
UW-L Graduation Date: May 2016

I graduated from Delavan – Darien High School with high honors and am the first in my family to attend college and pursue higher education. While on campus, I have had experience in many diverse leadership roles and currently serve as a Vanguard. With a passion for the health care field, I have completed courses as a nursing assistant and an emergency medical technician, and have spent time volunteering at Gundersen Health System in the pediatrics unit. Additionally, I am paying my way through college by working in the food industry: I have been serving for approximately 3 years in a fine dining restaurant called the Frontier at Lake Lawn Resort (and I am the youngest server to be appointed to this position at the resort, being promoted from a host at the age of 18).

Now, I find myself in a transitory phase between early adulthood and the real world. I am currently on the pursuit to secure a research project within my fields of interest which include health psychology, evidence-based practice, and health behaviors.

MICHAEL GONZALEZ
Major: Therapeutic Recreation
UW-L Graduation Date: May 2017

TRAVIS HARRISON
Major: Biology
UW-L Graduation Date: May 2016

I wish to continue my education toward doctorate in biochemistry. When I complete my education, I plan to delve into research and development for biochemical applications. I would also like to expand my knowledge in different areas of science such as mathematics and physics. Continuing and broadening education is important to me because I believe that an individual or an idea can only be bettered by more knowledge.

Aside from education, I use exercise to clear my mind and stay healthy. I cannot find something that I like more than hiking in the woods … Nothing but nature and me. Too bad I am from Milwaukee -- a location that is not very close to much hiking areas, but I made do with what I had.

The most powerful tool I use to waste a lot of time is Netflix. My favorite shows are Breaking Bad, Prison Break and Dexter. Another great activity that passes time is reading. I do enjoy books more than movies because the story is open to my imagination. My favorite book is The Hot Zone by Richard Preston. I believe that these forms of entertainment can teach everyone different lessons or ideas.

Jobs can teach people a lot too. I learned plenty as an assistant coach for a swim club, like skills in leadership, organization, and communication. Coaching did help me in many ways, but being a new member in the McNair Program has already taught me so much. I am ready to learn more while being a positive and contributing member.

DYLAN MONTOURE
Major: Biology
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I am from Green Bay, Wisconsin. As a kid I enjoyed being outside in all seasons. Having a brother close in age, we often would make up adventures pretending to be knights or pirates fighting bad guys until our mom would call us in for dinner. As I got older, the adventures and games evolved into sports such as football and baseball which I would play with friends at a nearby park. I continued my enthusiasm for sports and the outdoors in high school when I became a three season athlete while still finding time for school and outdoor hobbies such as fishing and hunting.

My senior year I was faced with a challenge when it was time to start thinking about college and deciding what I wanted to study. I knew I was interested in biology, but found it difficult to decide if I wanted to study anatomy and the human body or ecology and the environment. I finally made my decision after my first semester in college. I realized that the reason I even began to play sports was because I enjoyed being outside. I came to the conclusion that I want to pursue a career where I can be outside most of the time instead of working in a hospital or lab. After this decision I declared my concentration in Environmental Science. I do not know yet the specific job I am working towards, but I am confident that the rest of my undergraduate and graduate career will open new opportunities and ideas that I have not yet even considered.
I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN RACINE, WISCONSIN. I WAS ORIGINALLY DRAWN TO LA CROSSE for their Exercise Science program; it’s among the best in Wisconsin. However, after spending some time in La Crosse and feeling like it was not a good fit, I decided to transfer to UW-Milwaukee to continue my coursework. It was there that I took my first Psychology course. I immediately gravitated toward the field because of the interesting research experiments I read and how broad the field of Psychology was.

I am most interested in the fields of Forensic Psychology and Multiracial Studies. My interest in Forensic Psychology came about through being exposed to our faulty Judicial System and questioning what’s wrong with it. I knew that I wanted to really understand the complexity of our judicial system – the judges, the jurors, the sentencing, and everything that the courts encompassed. It was then that I decided to go back to UW-L and finish my coursework as a Psychology student. Returning to UW-L turned out to be the greatest decision I’ve made. In the past semester I was able to attend the Critical Mixed Race Conference, which was a very eye-opening experience because as someone who identifies as a mixed race person, I could really relate to other people and their research. Thus my interest for Multiracial Studies developed. It made me want to commence my own research and learn about the experiences of other people that identify as mixed race, biracial, or multiracial as well.

EBONY PHILLIPS
Major: Psychology
UW-L Graduation Date: Dec. 2015

I INTEND TO EARN MY PH. D. IN SOCIOLOGY AND EVENTUALLY WORK WITH SUBSTANCE abuse rehabilitation programming and reform. I recently was hired to be a House Monitor at Ophelia’s House, a home for women rehabilitating from jail, many of whom struggle with substance abuse issues. This will be an incredible opportunity for me to work first hand with the substance abuse rehabilitation programs in La Crosse County. In addition to Ophelia’s House, I also work at the UW-L Climbing Wall at the Recreational Eagle Center, where I’ve been supervising and teaching classes since my freshman year.

I am originally from New London, Wisconsin where I was a cross country runner, forensics speaker, and 4-Her. I was selected to be the 2013 Waupaca County Fairest of the Fair, which allowed me to speak to fairgoers, introduce judges, and promote the fair in parades across the county. This experience helped me realize my love of public speaking, a passion I am excited to use in future research presentations. I am finishing my first ever independent research project this spring, which explores the presence of “love languages” in intimate relationships across generations at UW-L.

CASSANDRA PHILIPPON
Majors: Psychology; Sociology
UW-L Graduation Date: May 2016

MY NAME IS GAOKHIA, BUT I PREFER TO GO BY KHIA. IN MY FAMILY, I AM THE SECOND oldest of six children. I have one older sister, three younger sisters, and one younger brother. My parents fled from the Vietnam War and came to live in the United States. They met and married here in La Crosse and had my oldest sister in 1992.

I was raised here in La Crosse up until 2005 when my family and I moved to Holmen, which is about 20 minutes north, and where I from Holmen High School in 2012. Here at UW-L, I am the Vice President of the Hmong Organization Promoting Education on campus through the Office of Multicultural Students. In addition to being a student, I work part-time at Park Bank as the drive-up teller.

For grad school, I intend on pursuing a dual MD/PhD degree in Medicine and Neurology. I started to develop my interest in this field after taking a Psychology course in high school and because my mom went through a traumatic car accident that led to her seeing a neurologist. I realized that through studying it and talking about it, I was gaining the hope that one day I could possibly pursue a degree in Neurology. I am starting off by assisting Dr. Peg Maher with some of the research that she is already doing, and I hope it will also spark more for my own research in the future.

GAOKHIA YANG
Major: Biomedical Science
UW-L Graduation Date: May 2017

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GAOKHIA YANG
Major: Biomedical Science
UW-L Graduation Date: May 2017
Yolona (Yoli) Ngandali, an Archaeology major in the College of Liberal Studies, is one of three McNair Scholars who graduated from UW-L in December 2014. Her unique combination of interests in digital media production and archaeological studies have led her on an interesting career path fusing her diverse skillsets together.

After high school, Yoli carried on with the love of digital arts that she discovered in high school art classes and began taking classes in videography, animation, graphic design, and other digital media at Minneapolis Community & Technical College. She especially enjoyed the production aspects of this field, and it paid off: her digital media portfolio won first place at MCTC with $1,000 award. She put her Associate’s Degree in Audio/Video/Digital Media Production to use as an event and wedding photographer, but over time grew to feel that these jobs were not satisfying her desire to be more on the post-production/editing side, so she began considering other possible career options.

It was her younger brother Daniel who introduced her to a new interest that would soon become her driving passion. As a student at Central Lakes College, Daniel had heard of courses they offered in scuba diving, and he encouraged his sister Yoli to join him. She spent the summer of 2010 exploring the underwater depths with Daniel, earning her scuba certification along the way and using her digital arts skills for underwater photography. During one of their scuba outings, a strange, unexpected object came into focus within the murky waters: a sunken sailboat. This sparked Yoli’s interest – where had the boat come from, and what had caused it to sink? No one knew, but Yoli realized that her determination to discover the history of this object had given her the momentum to pursue a new field: archaeology!

Yoli went back to MCTC for another semester to try out some courses in anthropology and archaeology. She was very excited by the possibilities for archaeological discovery, and thus began her search for a Bachelor’s program in Archaeology. Unlike most universities whose undergraduate degree programs focus on anthropology, UW-L has one of the very few comprehensive archaeology-focused programs in the country. Yoli chose UW-L in part for the exciting opportunities we provide for undergrad students to get their hands dirty in the Archaeology Lab by collecting, cleaning, and cataloging artifacts. She has been working in the Archaeology Lab at UW-L for several years now and has worked on many groundbreaking projects.

As a major contributor in her department and a respected expert across UW-L in digital media production, Yoli was approached this year by Murphy Library to replace their existing 10 year old archaeological display. Funding was provided by the College of Liberal Studies for Yoli to design and print an entirely new set of large display panels highlighting research by UW-L faculty and students in the Archaeology department, as well as the Heritage Management project that UW-L collaborates on with local and state governments to collect and preserve archaeological artifacts discovered at construction sites. Two of Yoli’s undergraduate research projects, funded by both the McNair Scholars Program and the Office for Undergraduate Research & Creativity, were also...
given special mention on the new library displays. Her Senior Thesis studied the relationship between Aboriginal rock art and European exploration in Australia, and her McNair research project involved converting analysis from the Archaeology Lab into 3D scans of artifacts and the subsequent design of an interactive website, “Visualizing Wisconsin’s Prehistory with Digital Media.” (Find the website by searching for Yoli’s name on uwlax.edu!)

Yoli designed the new archaeology displays for Murphy Library using 5 different panels

A few of the artifacts being exhibited in the new archaeology displays

Yoli delivered the Winter 2014 Commencement Speech

Photo courtesy of Hanqing Wu

Yoli admits that she was a bit of a recluse when she started at UW-L, struggling to make connections and often feeling out of place. But once she was accepted into the McNair Scholars Program, she found the confidence to move out of her comfort zone to build new friendships and network with people by presenting her research across the country. She has also gained an appreciation for the fact that all students, at some point, feel like they’re not as capable as they truly are; but with support from the McNair program, Yoli has realized if you set and work toward your own goals, you’ll stop worrying what others think and will be able to reach your full potential. These are a few of the topics Yoli touched on during the Winter 2014 Commencement ceremony, where she was specially selected from candidates across campus to deliver the speech.

Yoli is bringing her expertise in archaeology, multimedia, and communication with her to graduate school, where she embraces the chance to jumpstart the next phase of her career. She applied to 6 Master’s and Doctoral programs in Anthropology (Subfield Archaeology) this fall, including Washington State University where she was actively recruited after an Archaeology faculty member at WSU found an article about her in the La Crosse Tribune. Ultimately, she hopes to develop a career that blends her computer application background with both field and lab archaeological studies. She aspires to spend most of her time out in the field working as an archaeological community liaison between the local community members, indigenous populations, and other scholars to collect input from all sides on collaborative projects. Yoli plans to enroll in a graduate program to continue on this journey in Fall 2015.

We thank Yoli for all of her contributions to UW-L and to the McNair Scholars Program, and wish her best of luck in achieving all of her goals!
McNair Alumni: Where Are They Now?

Jeffrey Albrecht
Class of: 2012
UW-L Majors: Psychology & Philosophy
Currently: In his 3rd year of a PhD program at University of Michigan studying Educational Psychology

Francesca Bautista
Class of: 2012
UW-L Major: Psychology
Currently: Graduated from Rutgers University in 2014 with a Master’s in Social Work

Donica Spence
Class of: 2013
UW-L Major: Biology
Currently: In her 2nd year of a Master’s program at New Mexico State University studying Biological Anthropology; Now applying for PhD programs

Ryan Nell
Class of: 2012
UW-L Major: Communication Studies
Currently: Graduated from UW-L in 2014 with a Master of Education in Student Affairs Administration

Adia Brooks
Class of: 2012
UW-L Major: Political Science
Currently: Graduated from University of Texas at Austin in 2014 with a Master’s in African & Diaspora Studies; Now in her 1st year at UT School of Law

Sasha ChiHak
Class of: 2012
UW-L Major: Chemistry
Currently: In her 3rd year of a PhD program at Texas A&M studying Chemistry
FYRE Program: Events & Highlights

By TC Yang. First Year Research Exposure (FYRE) is an academic diversity initiative program for first year underrepresented students of color who are interested in STEM majors at UW-L. This year there are 12 FYRE participants with majors such as computer science, physics, and biochemistry. These students were invited onto campus two weeks prior to the start of the Fall semester for Welcome Weeks, which helped students get situated and familiar with not only the campus community but also the La Crosse community.

In addition to the Welcome Week, FYRE holds exposure events for students to learn about a variety of career paths and graduate school opportunities. One of the exposure events this year was a stream sample in which students took a trip to a nearby stream, collected invertebrates, analyzed the invertebrates on-site, and determined the health of the stream. In another exposure opportunity, FYRE students went to a site where there was evidence of invasive grass growing which was preventing native seeds from germinating. At the site, students collected native seeds and brought them back to campus so they could be germinated for future replanting.

Most recently, FYRE students took part in Winter Week in which they returned to campus one week before Spring semester and participated in a variety of events. Such events included a resume workshop, a visit to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and a college visit to the University of Minnesota. A highlight of FYRE students’ Winter Week was the Bell Museum of Natural History. Students got to see many amazing exhibits! Closer to La Crosse, FYRE students toured the Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center in French Island and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in Onalaska during Winter Week. Overall, Winter Week provided FYRE participants with various science research and career opportunity ideas!
FYRE Reflection – Duabchi Yang

Ever see the movie Inception? The whole point of the movie was to plant an idea without anyone knowing. I believe that same thing happened to me, where the idea of coming to UW-La Crosse was implanted in my head before I could even remember. I have always loved science, and I knew that UW-L was the perfect place for me. I am a Microbiology and Biology double major with a Biomedical Science concentration. Being part of First Year Research Exposure has reassured my passion for research and science. I have been a student at UW-L for about a year and look forward to hopefully going to graduate school here.

During the first week of FYRE, Welcome Week, I met eleven other amazing people who were interested in a similar field of study I was. We bonded like hydrogen and oxygen, our friendship still strong today. We study together, eat together, and dare I say it -- we have fun together!

Being part of FYRE has made me realize the endless opportunities within the STEM field. By going on exposures to research facilities and on campus services, I have personally made many connections that opened many opportunities for me. The week we returned to campus early in January (dubbed Winter Week) we went to Mayo Clinic in Rochester and the University of Minnesota’s campus. There, we learned more about graduate programs and the summer research opportunities they held there. For the Winter Week activities in La Crosse, we visited two government research facilities. It was at once of these that I met a fish biologist who I quickly connected with to obtain a volunteering position in her lab.

Apart from Winter Week, the weekly meetings and tutoring sessions the FYRE program offers helped me with my first semester of college. I had a personal tutor who is a McNair Scholar. Through his partnership was I able to do well in my biology course. This semester, I am in a chemistry course with a few of my FYRE friends. By already knowing some people in my class beforehand, I feel more comfortable and that I can do better than if I were alone.

My experience with FYRE has been extremely beneficial and important. I believe it has given me a push to succeed and to have a better chance into being accepted into the McNairs Scholars Program, along with getting into graduate school. I cannot stress enough how grateful I am to still be in this cohort that has helped me with my first year of college, and I would recommend it to future incoming first year students. I thank the little top still spinning in my head for coming to UW-L and having the chance to be with people who care so much about the next generation’s future.
McNair Scholars Program, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse 2014 - 2015

**FYRE Reflection – Corina Valencia**

*When I first stepped foot on the campus of UW-La Crosse, I knew immediately it was where I belonged. The amazing reputation of the school, its beauty, and the outstanding student to faculty ratio were incomparable in my eyes. My passion is having a career in the medical field, and UW-La Crosse is known for its prestigious College of Science and Health along with its competitive Physician’s Assistant program. When I applied to the FYRE program, I knew getting accepted would expose some great opportunities, but I didn’t realize how much it would actually help define my first year of college individually, academically, and experientially.*

The summer Welcome Weeks of the FYRE program significantly established my adjustment to and preparedness for my freshman year of college. Not only was I able to confidentially navigate myself around campus by the time classes started, I was exposed to all of the available on-campus student resources. Developing a comforting cohort with the other students in the program, many of which I still consider good friends, is another amazing experience of being in this program. The one-on-one advising sessions, Bio 105 (Introductory Biology) review sessions, and exposure to countless undergraduate research opportunities are some of the many benefits of being in this program that not only have prepared me to succeed in my first year of college but also has exposed me to tools to help me be competitive for grad school.

I could not feel more appreciative and fortunate to be part of such an amazing program. It is because of FYRE that I am able to attain competitive grades in challenging classes, sharpen critical professional skills, and boost my confidence. This unforgettable experience with the FYRE program has allowed me to do my best to someday achieve my goal of getting accepted into a graduate program.

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**Corina (far right) modeling the FYRE shirts with the crew: (Left to right): Ashli Harris, Grad Assistant TC Yang, Duabchi Vang, Kellen Housey, Goozie Yang, Erica Hei, Malcolm Yang, Estefania Cruz, Shirley Yang, AJ Villareal, Adrienne Hester, Corina Valencia.**

**The FYRE students visited the US Fish & Wildlife Service laboratories during Winter Week. Left to right: Karyna Quick, Corina Valencia, Duabchi Vang.**

**Some of the FYRE ladies during a tour of Myrick Park and Marsh in Summer 2014.**