



# FACULTY MENTOR HANDBOOK

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>1.General Information .....</b>	<b>pg 1</b>
<b>2.Purpose and Eligibility .....</b>	<b>pg 2</b>
<b>3.Role of the Faculty Mentor .....</b>	<b>pg 3-4</b>
<b>4.Tips for Effective Mentoring .....</b>	<b>pg 4</b>
<b>5.Writing Better Letters of Recommendation .....</b>	<b>pg 5-6</b>
<b>6.NEIU McNair Scholars Program .....</b>	<b>pg 7-8</b>
<b>7.Program Documents for Mentors .....</b>	<b>pg 9</b>

## **General Information**

### **Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program**

The McNair Scholars Program is a federal TRIO program funded at 151 institutions across the United States and Puerto Rico by the U.S. Department of Education. It is designed to prepare undergraduate students for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities. McNair participants are either (1) first-generation college students with financial need, or (2) members of a group that is traditionally underrepresented in graduate education who have demonstrated strong academic potential. The goal of the McNair Scholars Program is to increase graduate degree awards for students from underrepresented segments of society.

### **Ronald E. McNair, Ph.D.**

Ronald Erwin McNair was born October 21, 1950 in Lake City, South Carolina. While in junior high school, Dr. McNair was inspired to work hard and persevere in his studies by his family and by a teacher who recognized his scientific potential and believed in him. Dr. McNair graduated as valedictorian from Carver High School in 1967. In 1971, he graduated magna cum laude and received a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics from North Carolina A&T State University (Greensboro). Dr. McNair then enrolled in the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1976, at the age of 26, he earned his Ph.D. in laser physics. His dissertation was titled, "Energy Absorption and Vibrational Heating in Molecules Following Intense Laser Excitation." Dr. McNair was presented an honorary doctorate of Laws from North Carolina A&T State University in 1978, an honorary doctorate of Science from Morris College in 1980, and an honorary doctorate of science from the University of South Carolina in 1984.

While working as a staff physicist with Hughes Research Laboratory, Dr. McNair soon became a recognized expert in laser physics. His many distinctions include being a Presidential Scholar (1971-74), a Ford Foundation Fellow (1971-74), a National Fellowship Fund Fellow (1974-75), and a NATO Fellow (1975). He was also a sixth-degree black belt in karate and an accomplished saxophonist. Because of his many accomplishments, he was selected by NASA for the space shuttle program in 1978. His first space shuttle mission launched successfully from Kennedy Space Center on February 3, 1984. Dr. Ronald E. McNair was the second African American to fly in space. Two years later he was selected to serve as mission specialist aboard the ill-fated U.S. Challenger space shuttle. He was killed instantly when the Challenger exploded one minute, thirteen seconds after it was launched. Dr. McNair was posthumously awarded the Congressional Space Medal of Honor. After his death in the Challenger Space Shuttle accident on January 28, 1986, members of Congress provided funding for the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program. Their goal was to encourage low-income, first-generation college students and students from historically underrepresented ethnic groups to expand their educational opportunities by enrolling in a Ph.D. program and ultimately pursue an academic career. This program is dedicated to the high standards of achievement inspired by Dr. McNair's life.

## **Purpose**

The McNair Scholars Program at Northeastern Illinois University is designed to provide **first generation and low-income or underrepresented students** with a guided research experience under faculty mentorship, academic counseling, tutoring, and other scholarly activities with the goal of preparing students to successfully pursue post-secondary degrees. Scholars will participate in three seminar courses intended to prepare them for graduate studies through training in the development of a research-based thesis, support through the graduate school application process, financial awareness and professional/career skills development.

## **Eligibility Requirements**

Students who intend to pursue a career that requires a Ph.D. and who meet the following criteria should apply to the program. Eligibility requires one or both of the following:

1. Be a first-generation and [low-income](#) college student
2. Be a member of a group underrepresented in graduate education

Additionally, applicants must:

1. Have 60 credit hours completed
2. Have a cumulative GPA of **2.8 or higher (4.0)**
3. Be available to participate in a full-time summer research internship
4. Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident

## **To maintain good standing with the program, a scholar must:**

1. Participate in mandatory events
2. Complete all assignments assigned in McNair courses
3. Maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher (4.0)
4. Establish and maintain an appropriate meeting schedule with the faculty mentor
5. Comply with all federal, state, and local laws and all NEIU regulations and procedures while participating in the McNair Scholars Program
6. Comply with all McNair Scholars Program requirements as detailed in the Participation Agreement

## **Role of the Faculty Mentor**

Faculty mentors are an integral part of the McNair Scholars Program by giving scholars exposure to conducting primary research beyond traditional classroom experiences. Faculty are the key resource to exposing scholars to conducting research with field specific guidance from the project conceptualization, collection and interpretation of data, writing a research paper, and preparing presentations for symposiums and/or other professional conferences. Although it is not mandatory, we encourage faculty to support students in publishing their research in a scholarly journal.

### **Mentors Responsibilities Include:**

1. Providing feedback as the scholar develops their research proposal during the NEIU 301 (Spring) session.
2. Supporting the student performing, analyzing, and interpreting the research proposed in their McNair 301 course proposal.
3. Academic advising support.
4. Encouraging scholars to enroll in a graduate program in the Fall following the completion of the scholars' undergraduate degree.
5. Having discussions to identify graduate programs that fit the academic goals of the scholar. Scholars will apply to approximately 7 graduate programs.
6. Providing scholars with letters of recommendation for graduate school applications.

### **Meetings with McNair Office:**

Faculty mentors should be in contact with the McNair office to ensure scholars are making satisfactory progress in both research and academic endeavors. Mentors should plan on meeting with the McNair office while they are mentoring a scholar. The McNair office will reach out to schedule a time.

1. Prior to signing the Faculty Mentor Contract, especially for first time mentors. This meeting should take place in late Fall Semester or early Spring Semester. An overview of expectations will be provided and discussed.
2. At the beginning of the Summer research. This meeting should take place in late Spring or early Summer Semester. This will include a discussion of the Summer Research Action Plan.
3. At the end of the Summer research. This meeting should take place in early Fall Semester to discuss the progress and accomplishments of the scholar during their summer research and identify a timeline for completing the research paper based on the summer research.
4. Any time the mentor has questions or concerns about a scholar's research or academic progress they should contact the McNair office.

### **Benefits to Mentors:**

1. Encouraging scholars to pursue advanced degrees in mentor's field of study
2. Mentoring scholars about conducting research in a real world situation
3. Supporting scholars pursuing their research passions
4. Increasing diversity in the workforce
5. **\$500 stipend for research mentorship**

### **Summer Research Details**

1. Scholars will carry out research described in the proposal developed during the NEIU 301 unless participating in an external summer research program (REU, SROP, etc).
2. Mentors will provide scholars with guidance during the development (Spring), performing, analyzing and interpreting (Summer) of the research project.
3. Mentors will guide scholars in writing a paper based on the summer research in a format appropriate to the field.
4. If students are accepted to a summer research program at another institution, the mentor will advise the student on writing a paper in a format appropriate to the field and provide comments on the paper written to describe the summer research.
5. Summer research papers should be completed by the end of the following Fall Semester (exceptions can be granted on a case by case basis).
6. Mentors will support students in the IRB application process, if needed.
7. Mentors will meet as needed during the Spring to help develop the research proposal and weekly during the Summer to monitor the research progress.

### **Tips for effective Mentoring**

1. Work with scholars to develop short- and long-term research and professional goals.
2. Communicate regularly with scholars about progress on research and any changes in timetables or deadlines.
3. Read and return work promptly and comment on it constructively.
4. Clarify the student's expectations and the policies of the programs to which they apply.
5. Acknowledge that scholars have responsibilities in addition to conducting research.
6. Know requirements and benchmarks for the scholar's degree program.
7. Help scholars develop innovative research and dissertation topics.
8. Provide the scholar with opportunities to develop and practice professional skills.
9. Inform and advise scholars about workshops and seminars to enhance their professional development.
10. Help the scholars develop a marketable professional portfolio.

## **Writing Better Letters of Recommendation**

### **1. Be sure you want to recommend this student**

- Discuss the student's academic objectives and preparation before agreeing to write a recommendation
- Help student choose graduate programs that match interests, skills and preparation
- Consider that the letter may need to be modified for other graduate school programs

### **2. Get enough data to write a strong letter, including:**

- Transcript and/or list of classes in major
- The student's personal statement
- Graded work sample: paper or lab project (for students who were not in your class)
- Résumé or CV
- List of honors and awards
- Some idea of what the student does in their spare time
- Required information from the target graduate school
- *Note when student is going to apply and the application deadline(s)*

### **3. List student's basic skills**

- E.g.: "\_\_\_\_\_ has command of coherent wave optics, Fourier optics, laser physics, lens design, optical metrology, and related areas of physics."

### **4. Describe a particularly successful project**

- Find one or more "above and beyond" stories to focus on
- Remember, the candidate needs to be special, out of the ordinary (or, presumably, you shouldn't be recommending him/her)
- Note any positions or forms of departmental service such as proctor, TA, RA, tutor, etc.

### **5. Get personal when appropriate**

- State any adversities the student has overcome
- Highlight first generation status, health or family, and special talents (you can be the student's advocate rather than him/her on these issues, which is more sophisticated than having the student address them)
- If you enjoy having this student in your classes, say so and explain why

### **6. Close by predicting the student's success in the program**

- "\_\_\_\_\_ is one of the top students I've worked with in recent years"
- "\_\_\_\_\_ has a razor-sharp mind..."
- "This student has tremendous potential..."
- "\_\_\_\_\_ is more than adequately prepared..."
- "I am confident that \_\_\_\_\_ will be an outstanding graduate student and go on to make major contributions in the field through both research and teaching."

### **7. Abandon the form and customize**

- When possible, attach a separate letter to describe the student's strengths not addressed on form letters
- Include your and the student's name, perhaps, but no more.  
Be sure to inform them of the separate attachment: "See attached letter addressing these and other issues..."

Adapted from *Graduate Admissions Essays*, © 2000 Donald Asher, available from 1-800-841-BOOK or Amazon.com

# Avoiding gender bias in reference writing

Got a great student? Planning to write a super letter of reference?  
Don't fall into these common traps based on unconscious gender bias.

## Mention research & publications

Letters of reference for men are 4x more likely to mention publications and twice as likely to have multiple references to research. Make sure you put these critical accomplishments in every letter!

## Don't stop now!

On average, letters for men are 16% longer than letters for women and letters for women are 2.5x as likely to make a minimal assurance ('she can do the job') rather than a ringing endorsement ('she is the best for the job').

## Emphasize accomplishments, not effort

Letters for reference for men are more likely to emphasize accomplishments ('his research', 'his skills', or 'his career') while letters for women are 50% more likely to include 'grind-stone' adjectives that describe effort. 'Hard-working' associates with effort, but not ability.

## We all share bias

It is important to remember that unconscious gender bias isn't a male problem. Research shows that women are just as susceptible to these common pitfalls as men. This is a problem for all of us - let's solve it together!

## Keep it professional

Letters of reference for women are 7x more likely to mention personal life - something that is almost always irrelevant for the application. Also make sure you use formal titles and surnames for both men and women.

## Stay away from stereotypes

Although they describe positive traits, adjectives like 'caring', 'compassionate', and 'helpful' are used more frequently in letters for women and can evoke gender stereotypes which can hurt a candidate. And be careful not to invoke these stereotypes directly ('she is not emotional').

## Be careful raising doubt

We all want to write honest letters, but negative or irrelevant comments, such

as 'challenging personality' or 'I have confidence that she will become better than average' are twice as common in letters for female applicants. Don't add doubt unless it is strictly necessary!

### Adjectives to avoid:      Adjectives to include:

caring  
compassionate  
hard-working  
conscientious  
dependable  
diligent  
dedicated  
tactful  
interpersonal  
warm  
helpful

successful  
excellent  
accomplished  
outstanding  
skilled  
knowledgeable  
insightful  
resourceful  
confident  
ambitious  
independent  
intellectual

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Commission on the  
Status of Women

Research from Trix, F & Psenka, C. Exploring the color of glass: Letters of recommendation for female and male medical faculty. *Discourse & Society*, 2003; and Madera, JM, Hebl, MR, & Martin, RC. Gender and letters of Recommendation for Academia: Agentive and Communal Differences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2009.



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## **NEIU McNair Scholars Program Overview**

The following objectives were formed to meet the overall project goal of increasing the participation of McNair Scholars in graduate and doctoral studies:

- 28 McNair Program participants will be served each year.
- At least 80% of McNair participants will complete research and scholarly activities that will directly impact their educational progression each academic year.
- At least 66% of McNair Scholars will enroll in a post baccalaureate program by the fall term of the academic year immediately following completion of their bachelor's degree.
- At least 83% of graduated McNair Scholars will continue to be enrolled in graduate programs after the first year.
- At least 6% of McNair Program participants will attain a doctoral degree within ten years of the attainment of the bachelor's degree.

## **NEIU McNair Scholars Process Objectives**

Below are the Process Objectives for the NEIU McNair Scholar Program. These objectives are relevant in defining the role of faculty mentors:

- Identify, recruit and select first-generation, and low-income students or historically underrepresented students **to work in collaboration with a faculty mentor.**
- Guide and support scholars as they identify research topics, develop a plan for conducting the research, and complete research projects **under the direction of a faculty mentor.**
- Review student progress and determine any necessary academic support in a timely manner.
- Provide the necessary academic and social support to insure the continuation and completion of the baccalaureate degree **with the assistance of faculty mentors.**
- Assist scholars in the selection of appropriate graduate programs, and guide them in the application and acceptance process as a requirement of a seminar on preparing for graduate study. Each scholar will apply to seven graduate programs.

## **Activities and Benefits for Scholars**

### **Program activities focus on:**

- Faculty mentorship
- Graduate school advising
- Summer research project
- Academic advising
- GRE preparation
- Seminars
- Workshops
- Cultural activities

### **Program Services:**

- Academic, career, and personal counseling
- Faculty mentorship
- Librarian mentorship
- Annual \$2,800 summer research stipend
- Participation in a summer research project
- Opportunities to present and publish research
- Funded conference travel (as budget allows)
- Assistance in applying to graduate school
- GRE preparation workshops and fee waivers
- Application fee waivers for graduate programs
- Assistance in applying for fellowships, grants, and other financial support
- Graduate school visits
- Workshops to support academic, professional, and personal development

### **Seminar courses for McNair Scholars (three at one credit hour each):**

- *NEIU 301: Developing a Research-Based Thesis*(Springsemester)
- *NEIU 303: Preparing for Graduate School*(Summer semester)
- *NEIU 302: Professional Development for Graduate School and Future Careers*  
(Fall semester)

## **Program Documents for Mentors**

1. McNair Scholars Program Faculty Mentor Contract  
Submit by **March 25th**
2. Summer Research Proposal Approval Form  
Required for scholar to begin receiving research stipend  
Submit by **June 1st**
3. Research Action Plan  
Submit by **June 15th** (with the Research Time Sheet)
4. Research Time Sheet  
Scholar will submit **Four** time sheets as documentation to receive research stipend payments.  
Due: 1) with Summer Research Proposal Approval Form, 2) June 15th, 3) July 15th) and 4) with Summer Research Paper Approval Form
5. Summer Research Paper Approval Form  
Submit by **November 1st** or when paper is complete\*  
  
\*If the scholar will continue research during the academic year and would like to write up the research for a later date, please request an extension and include this extension documentation (provided by the McNair office) with the final paper.
6. Supplies Request Form
7. Request for Lump Sum Payment Form  
Emailed to the faculty mentor  
Submit by **October 1st, 2022**



## **McNair Scholars Program Faculty Mentor Contract**

**Submit by March 25th, 2022**

The faculty mentor must meet with their McNair Scholar mentee regularly until the completion of the research project. Mentors must 1) provide feedback on the research proposal, 2) oversee data collection, analysis and interpretation, 3) provide feedback on a final paper and 4) support the scholar publishing/presenting the research, if appropriate. Lastly, the faculty mentor will advise their mentee(s) in identifying appropriate graduate programs for their training goals, provide feedback on their academic and personal statement, curriculum vitae, and provide letters of recommendation upon request.

I have read the above statement and I agree to serve as a faculty mentor for the McNair Scholar named below.

**Name of scholar:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of mentor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Academic Department:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Office Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of mentor:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Please return this contract to the McNair Program Office, B 141 or email to [mcnairp@neiu.edu](mailto:mcnairp@neiu.edu).*



# McNair Scholars Program Summer Research Proposal Approval

Submit by June 1st, 2022

Scholar Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Discipline: \_\_\_\_\_

*Directions: 1) Describe your proposed Summer Research Project, use additional pages as necessary  
2) Attach a copy of the research proposal, research project action plan, and a research timesheet  
3) Ask your mentor to review the proposal and sign the form  
4) Return the signed form and copy of the proposal to the McNair Scholars Program Office.*

## STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

*This is the topic your research will explore. State what knowledge gap will be filled or what new knowledge will be added to the field.*

## HYPOTHESES AND/OR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

*List the hypothesis(s) to be tested or state the research question(s) you will investigate.*

## METHODS OF DATA GATHERING/METHODOLOGY

*Tell how **data** will be gathered to answer the question(s) or test the hypotheses.*

## DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

*Tell how the data will be **analyzed** in order to reach conclusions about the questions or hypotheses.*

## PROJECT ACTION PLAN

*Attach an action plan that includes a **timeline** / list of research **activities** that will allow project completion by the end of the eight-week summer session.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Faculty Mentor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Deborah Klos Dehring,  
Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



# McNair Scholars Program

## Research Action Plan

Scholar Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in the activities you plan to perform in the course of your research. This can include, but is not limited to: additional literature review, meetings with mentor or McNair staff, experiments/activities you plan to perform, data you plan to analyze, writing the paper summarizing your research and findings. You can be as specific or goal oriented as you like with your plan, i.e. read 4 more papers on your research topic, perform experiment x, y and z, interview 5 subjects for your study, etc.

<b>Week 1</b>	
<b>Week 2</b>	
<b>Week 3</b>	
<b>Week 4</b>	
<b>Week 5</b>	
<b>Week 6</b>	

<b>Week 7</b>	
<b>Week 8</b>	



## McNair Scholars Program Research Timesheet

Scholar Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Research Activity	Hours
	Total Hours:	
	Total Amount Paid:	

I certify that this report reasonably reflects the activities for which I have suitable means of verifying that the research was performed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Scholar Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Faculty Mentor Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Project Director Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date





## McNair Scholars Program Submission of Research Paper

Submit by November 1st, 2022

Scholar Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Discipline: \_\_\_\_\_

**TITLE OF PAPER:**

**ABSTRACT**

*Please attach*

**PAPER WILL BE SUBMITTED FOR PUBLICATION\*:**

*Title of journal:*

*Anticipated submission date:*

**PAPER WILL BE SUBMITTED FOR PRESENTATION\*:**

*Conference title & date:*

**\* If there are no plans to submit paper for publication or presentation, please explain:**

**APPROVAL:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Faculty Mentor

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Deborah Klos Dehring,  
Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## McNair Scholars Program Request for Research Project Support Funds

The NEIU McNair Scholars Program, under the guidance of the College of Graduate Studies and Research, offers up to \$250 to students working on a McNair Scholars research project. These funds can be used to defray costs associated with research such as lab supplies, art supplies, or software. **Funds are available to scholars who have an approved research proposal on file.**

**Directions:** The scholar should fill out this form and complete a one-page budget justification connecting each of the proposed expenses to the research project. This justification should also include specific purchasing information, such as vendor information and item number.

The mentor/advisor should review and approve the budget and its justification, indicating approval by their signature below.

Please submit this form and the budget justification to the McNair Scholars Program office (B-141) or [mcnairp@neiu.edu](mailto:mcnairp@neiu.edu).

In most instances, McNair Scholars Program staff will complete the purchase on the scholar's behalf in an effort to secure the best prices and remain compliant with University purchasing standards.

Student Name & ID#:

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Faculty Mentor/Advisor  
(signature):

---

Project Title:

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### Proposed Budget

Quantity	Item	Cost	Total
		<b>TOTAL</b>	

**Justification:**