

THE PHASE



The Our Lady of the Lake University McNair Scholars Program Newsletter

**Embrace his legacy.
Create your own.**



McNair Scholars Program
OUR LADY OF THE LAKE UNIVERSITY



A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

By: Director Dr. Jessica M. Quintero

Hello Scholars,

This Fall semester has been a real whirlwind. I have heard from both current and alumni scholars that this semester seemed busier than in recent times. I am so proud of your commitment to your craft and the work that you are investing in your future.

However, I do want to remind you of the importance of prioritizing self-care. Taking time to refill your cup, is not a luxury to be put off for a more convenient time. When you prioritize your well-being, you're better equipped to handle stress, make sound decisions, and contribute at your highest level.

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WELCOME SRI25

Spring 2025 welcomes 14 New Incoming Scholars

Aniyah Andrews
KINE

Isabella Arroyo
BIOL

Ava Caballero
CSCD

Darianna Carrillo
PSYC & BIOL

Gilberto Castro
PSYC & CJ

Katrina Dunakin
SOWK

Emelia Garcia
CSCD

Gabriella Guadarrama
EDU

Khristian Harden
PSYC

Annika Litterio
PSYC

Valeria Pena
BBA MKTG

Charlyne Reyes
PYSYC & CRIM

Briana Rodriguez
PSYC

Kevin Rubio-Lobaton
BBA FIN



From Left to Right: Katrina Dunakin, Emelia Garcia, Charlyne Reyes, Darianna Carrillo, Ava Caballero, Briana Rodriguez, Diego Zuniga, Aniyah Andrews, Steven Engbrecht, Nemesis Crociata, Kevin Rubio-Lobaton

UT GRAD VISIT

SRI24 Scholars Immerse Themselves in the UT Community

During the summer, SRI24 Scholars immersed themselves in the UT community, gaining first hand insights into program details, campus life, and available resources. Scholars also had the opportunity to connected with McNair Alumni and UT graduate students David Garcia (c/o 2021), and Alyssah Gonzalez (c/o 2021). This firsthand experience allowed scholars to visualize themselves as part of the UT community and better understand how the university aligns with their personal and professional goals. By addressing their questions and concerns, the visit empowered scholars to make an informed decision about taking the next step in their educational journey.



From Left to Right: Kimberlee Padilla Ponce, Alyssah Gonzalez, Bianca Villalobos, Alexis Moreno, Diego Zuniga, Abigail Jimenez, Alyna Guerrero, Roger Salas, David Garcia.

ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

Neurodiversity and Student Empowerment

This November, the McNair Scholars Program hosted alumna Amber Taylor, graduate student at the Center for Neurodiversity at Rowen University. Amber presented on “Empowering Students with ADHD for Success in Graduate School.”



Amber Taylor, B.A. (C/O 2022)

During her presentation, Amber shared valuable insights with students, discussing practical techniques and offering an array of resources to empower them in achieving their goals. Her relatable approach and engaging delivery fostered meaningful connections, creating a dynamic atmosphere where conversations flowed naturally and inspired all in attendance. As a passionate advocate for neurodiversity, Amber has expanded her impact and now serves on the Advisory Board for the Rowan Disability Student Union. In this role, she continues to champion inclusivity and equity, working to create spaces where individuals of all abilities can thrive. Amber’s journey exemplifies the transformative power of mentorship, community, and purpose-

driven work. Reflecting on her journey Amber shared, “I will say that working at the Center for Neurodiversity was influenced by working with Dr.Quintero, GiGi, my friends at McNair and our Grad Assistant Maddie.” Her time as a scholar not only shaped her academic and professional goals but also instilled a passion for advocacy and inclusivity. “They were always so kind to me when I was dealing with some difficulties in my final semester at OLLU. I wanted that level of compassion when I worked with students so the Center for Neurodiversity seemed perfect in assisting students in their educational journey but at the same time working with dozens of brilliant minds and letting them know it's okay to be themselves.”

ALUMNI SUPPORT

Dr. James Hernandez Engages with Incoming Scholars During Fall Session

Dr. James Hernandez, a proud alumnus of the McNair Scholars Program and holder of a PhD in Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching from the University of Texas at San Antonio, joined the Fall Session to engage with incoming scholars. With firsthand experience in the transformative power of mentorship, Dr. Hernandez emphasized the importance of student engagement and shared how the program shaped his academic journey.

Fall Sessions, held annually for incoming McNair Scholars, provide an in-depth program overview and a foundation for their academic success. By sharing personal experiences, Dr. Hernandez offered invaluable insights into how scholars can leverage program resources to maximize their opportunities. “By supporting these scholars, I aim to help them realize their potential, pursue their passions fearlessly, and create their own paths,” said Dr. Hernandez. “Their success is a testament to the lasting impact of the McNair Scholars Program and its ability to shape lives and inspire change.”

The session also included an interactive research workshop designed to introduce scholars to research best practices. “The workshop focused on breaking down the structure of research articles, identifying key sections like the abstract, introduction, methods, and conclusion, and developing strategies to extract the most critical information efficiently.



Photo of Incoming Scholars during Fall Session. From Left to Right: Dr. Hernandez, Khristian Harden, Gilberto Castro Jr., Charlyne Reyes, Emilia Garcia, Kevin Rubio, Katrina Dunakin, Darianna Carrillo

It was a collaborative effort, with the scholars actively participating and sharing their thoughts as we worked through the process.” The Fall Session not only set a strong foundation for the incoming scholars but also highlighted their incredible potential and enthusiasm for the journey ahead. Through mentorship and skill-building activities, the session highlighted the collaborative spirit and transformative opportunities that define the McNair Scholars Program.

ALUMNI NEWS

Alumni Making Strides in Our Community

Jessica Corona (c/o 2023) Named UTSA Transborder Digital Humanities Center-Consortium Fellow at UTSA

Jessica Corona (c/o 2023) who is currently pursuing her Masters degree in Spanish from the University of Texas San Antonio has just been named as UTSA's first Transborder Digital Humanities (TBDH) Center-Consortium Fellow. This fellowship will allow Jessica to continue her work on gender violence and feminicides in El Paso and San Antonio. The work she is doing through this fellowship will ultimately inform her thesis furthering the important work that she started earlier in her career at UTSA. Jessica's passion for this important work began while as a scholar at OLLU where her research *Los Crímenes Contra Las Mujeres Y Niñas de Juárez: Tres Décadas de Impunidad Y Violencia* brought attention to systemic sexual femicide in Ciudad Juárez.

Angelique Luna (C/O 2023) Received Funding for Thesis Research

Angelique Luna (c/o 2023) a member of the HEART Lab run by Dr. Danielle Bruns, has received funding to support her thesis research. This funding along with her research efforts will contribute to the larger research objective of the HEART Lab which is to identify the mechanisms of RV dysfunction in diabetes. Angelique's interest in cardiometabolic functions began while researching *Cardiometabolic Risk Factors in Hispanic College Aged Women* while at OLLU.

ANNUAL ALUMNI UPDATES

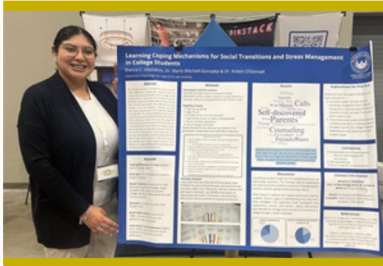
Alumni Survey Participant Support

It's that time of year again, time to complete the [Alumni Survey](#). If you are an alumni who graduated from Our Lady of the Lake since 2014, we need your help. Please complete the [Alumni Survey](#) and let us know how you're doing. The survey is brief and will remain open until February 14th.

In addition to the survey, we will also be reaching out via other avenues to ensure that we don't miss anyone. If you are still in contact with your cohort, share the news that we are trying to reach out. These updates help update us on your progress and are required by the Department of Education.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Fall 2024 National Research Presentation Conferences



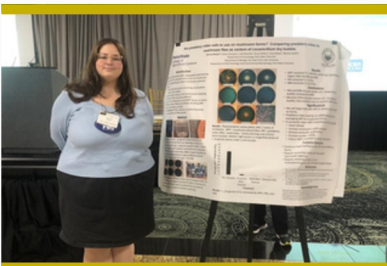
Bianca Villalobos (C/O 2025)

Bianca presented her research “Learning Coping Mechanisms for Social Transitions and Stress Management in College Students” at the 2024 Texas Association of School Psychologists (TASP) at Allen, TX in November.



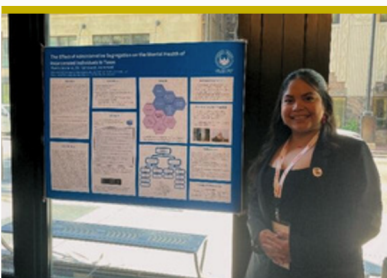
Alyna Guerrero (C/O 2024)

Alyna presented her research “Marianismo and Mental Health Help-Seeking Attitudes in College-Aged Latinas” at the 2024 Texas Association of School Psychologists (TASP) at Allen, TX in November. During the convention, Alyna was awarded with the TASP Fall Convention 2024 Exceptional Poster Presentation certificate.



Janessa Roney (C/O 2024)

Janessa presented her research “Oviposition Behavior of Trichogramma Dendrolimi: Elevating Temperatures are Affecting the Sex Ratio of T. Dendrolimi Offspring” at the 2024 Penn State Mushroom Conference at Mendenhall, Pennsylvania in October.



Alexis Moreno (C/O 2025)

Alexis presented her research “The Effect of Administrative Segregation on Prisoners’ Mental Health in Texas,” at the 2024 Southwestern Association of Criminal Justice (SWACJ) at Fort Worth, TX in October.



OUR LADY OF THE LAKE UNIVERSITY

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS CONTINUED



Abigail Jimenez (C/O 2025)

Abigail presented her research “The Role of Argumentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Devices and Treatment Techniques in Mental Health and Self-Advocacy” at the 2024 ELEVATE American Speech-Language Hearing Association at Seattle, WA in December.



Vanessa Rodriguez (C/O 2024)

Vanessa presented her research “Impact of Contamination on Bacterial Communities and Antibiotic Resistance” at the Florida International University McNair Scholars Research Conference at Miami, FL in October.



SCHOLAR ALUMNI INDUCTEES

Fall 2024 Graduates Join the Alumni Community

Six scholars join the ranks of alumni. Aaliyah Delgado received her BA in Biology with minors in Chemistry and Environmental Science and plans to pursue her Ph.D. Aaliyah has applied to three Ph.D. programs: Texas A&M, Texas State, and UTSA. Ayna Guerrero received her BA in Psychology with a minor in Child Studies. She plans to travel and make memories with family and friends before pursuing her Ph.D. Ayna has been accepted at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. Kimberlee Padilla Ponce received her BA in English and plans to enter the workforce to gain experience prior to pursuing her graduate studies. Roger Salas has received his BS in Computer Information Systems and Security. He has been accepted to the Cyber Security Management- MS program at Our Lady of the Lake University and will start this spring semester. Vanessa Rodriguez received her BS in Biology with a minor in Chemistry. Vanessa plans to pursue her Ph.D. in immunology or obtaining a research assistant position. Janessa Roney received her BS in Biology with a minor in Forensic Science. She plans to pursue her Ph.D. in Entomology.



From Left to Right: Roger Salas, Ayna Guerrero, Kimberlee Padilla Ponce, Aaliyah Delgado, Vanessa Rodriguez, Janessa Roney

JOIN US IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE

McNair Scholars Program Fund

This past Giving Tuesday, a global movement celebrating the power of generosity, we came together to make a difference for our McNair Scholars. But this is just the beginning! Your continued generosity can help these scholars reach even greater heights—empowering them to pursue doctorate programs without the added financial burden.



Let's keep the momentum going! Every contribution helps our scholars soar to new levels, proving that with support, determination, and community, there's no limit to what they can achieve. Thank you for being a part of this journey and for making a lasting impact on the future of exceptional students. Considering making a donation?

[VISIT OUR GIVING PAGE LINK HERE](#)

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

McNair Scholars Making Strides in Respective Fields

We are proud of the hard work and dedication our Fall 2024 graduates put into obtaining their bachelors degree. As these graduates move forward, we are confident they will continue to make significant contributions in their respective fields, embodying the spirit of excellence and inquiry fostered in the McNair Program.



SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS (cont.)



AALIYAH DELGADO (C/O 2024)

CONGRATULATIONS AALIYAH DELGADO

Bachelor of Arts, Biology Minor in Chemistry and Environmental Science

While in the program, Aaliyah, served as a research assistant in the Kapor Laboratory at UTSA and presented her work at two National McNair Scholars Research Conferences, one at Baylor University and one at The University of New Mexico. Her research focused on “Copper-nickel alloys and their applications in marine infrastructure.”



ALYNA GUERRERO
(C/O 2024)

CONGRATULATIONS ALYNA GUERRERO

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology Minor in Child Studies

While in the program, Alyna served as PI for her study on “Marianismo Beliefs and Mental Health Help-Seeking Attitudes Among College-Aged Latinas”. Her work was accepted for presentation at the UCLA and Baylor’s National McNair Scholars Research Conference, the UTSA Summer Undergraduate Research Conference, the Texas Counseling Association and the Texas Association of School Psychologists Conference, for which she was awarded a certificate in recognition of the exceptional poster presentation.



KIMBERLEE PADILLA PONCE
(C/O 2024)

CONGRATULATIONS KIMBERLEE PADILLA PONCE

Bachelor of Arts, English

While in the program, Kimberlee served as PI for her study, Voicing Depression and Anxiety: Women’s Mental Health in “Lady Lazarus” by Sylvia Plath and “Block Me Out” by Gracie Abrams. Her work was accepted for presentation at Baylor’s National McNair Scholars Research Conference and UTSA’s Summer Undergraduate Research Conference.

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS (cont.)



ROGER SALAS (C/O 2024)

CONGRATULATIONS ROGER SALAS

Bachelor of Science, Computer Information Systems & Security

While in the program, Roger served as PI for his study on “The Effects of Machine Learning-Based Anomaly Detection Systems in Reducing False Positives and False Negatives.” His work was accepted for presentation at Baylor’s National McNair Scholars Research Conference and UTSA’s Summer Undergraduate Research Conference.



VANESSA RODRIGUEZ
(C/O 2024)

CONGRATULATIONS VANESSA RODRIGUEZ

Bachelor of Science, Biology Minor in Chemistry

While in the program, Vanessa served as a research assistant in the Collins Laboratory at UT Health Science Center SA and presented her work at the National McNair Scholars Research Conference, at Florida International University. Her research focused on “The Reduced effectiveness of Naloxone in Reversing Fentanyl + Methamphetamine Cardiorespiratory Effects.”



JANESSA RONEY
(C/O 2024)

CONGRATULATIONS JANESSA RONEY

Bachelor of Science, Biology Minor in Forensic Science

While in the program, Janessa served as a research assistant in the Wolfen Laboratory at Penn State University and presented her work at the Baylor National McNair Scholars Research Conference, UTSA’s Summer Undergraduate Research Conference, and the Penn State Mushroom Conference. Her research focused on “Who’s the better vector of *Lecanicillium fungicola* dry bubble? Understanding the differences of the *Megaselia halterata* and *Stratiolaelaps scimitus* vectoring ability.”

WELCOME OUR NEW ADMIN COORDINATOR

New Administrative Coordinator Joins the Team

Jacqueline Alfaro, B.A joins the McNair Scholars team as the new Administrative Coordinator. Jacqueline, who goes by Jacqui, is a first-generation college graduate and proud alumna of OLLU. Jacqui earned her Bachelor of Arts in Communications with minors in Marketing and Psychology.



During her time as a student at OLLU, Jacqui served as the President for the Tri-Alpha First-Generation Honor Society, and as the Marketing Chair for the First-Generation Organization. She also served as the emcee at the Cesar Chavez March for Justice Press Conference in 2023, and as a guest speaker at OLLU’s historical donation ceremony of 2.2 million dollars from The Gloria and Hector Lopez Foundation. Additionally, Jacqui was recognized by the Student Government Association and Center for Student Involvement with the 2024 Achievement Award for her dedication to the university.

Jacqui has a wide range of experience working at both local nonprofits and private agencies, such as the City of San Antonio Department of Human Services, KGBTexas Communications, and greater:SATX where she collaborated in community driven campaigns. She’s also led multi thousand dollar grant initiatives that have connected local small, and woman owned business owners with grants offered by the City of San Antonio (COSA). Jacqui’s expertise includes leading impactful internship and resume workshops at two local San Antonio ISD high schools. Welcome to the McNair Scholars Program Jacqui, we are thrilled for you to join our team!



LAUNCH TIME WITH MCNAIR

SAM Launches a Five-Part Web Series

This Fall Semester the San Antonio McNair Scholars Programs (SAM) collaborated to host a lunchtime webinar series titled LaUNCH Time with McNair. Each SAM institution OLLU, St. Mary's, Trinity, and UTSA invited three scholar alumni to participate.

The purpose of this five-part web series was to reignite the academic journey of McNair Scholar Alumni and empower them to confidently navigate the doctoral application process while balancing professional and personal commitments. Session topics included identifying a suitable program, crafting their story, securing strong recommendation letters, financing their studies, and balancing life and Ph.D. studies.

Collectively, we are reviewing feedback from presenters and participants to determine areas for improvement. As of now, we will continue to limit the number of participants to allow enough time for engagement and questions. If you are interested in participating in an upcoming session or want to learn more, email us at mcnair@ollusa.edu. In your email, include your name, year graduated, and academic goal.



STAY CONNECTED!

Stay in the Loop with the Latest Updates

We encourage everyone to stay in the loop with the latest updates, events, and stories from our community by following us on our socials! Join the conversation, celebrate the hard work of McNair Scholars, and continue to collaborate in making a positive difference together!



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