



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - SUPERIOR

McNair Scholars Program

STUDENT STORIES

2018

ALUMNI
TOU KAO (T.K.) VANG
Sociology/Anthropology



My name is Tou Kao (T.K.) Vang. I am a first-generation college student and the first in my family to go to graduate school. My McNair Family at University of Wisconsin-Superior helped me so much, words can't express my gratitude for them. They have introduced me to doing scientific research, guided me through the process of applying to graduate school and have encouraged me to accomplish goals I would have never thought was possible.

Currently, I am finishing up my masters in Sociology (at University of Nebraska-Lincoln) and in the fall of 2018, I will be pursuing a PhD in Educational Psychology. My McNair family has been there every step of the way in this academic journey. From the day I got accepted into graduate school and to the day that I receive my PhD, I know they will always be there for me. Without the McNair, I would not be where I am today.

I am truly blessed to be a part of the McNair family and I am forever grateful to have them at my corner.

REGGIE SEMANKO

Legal Studies/Political Science



When I started the process of applying to undergraduate school, I had a plan. I had a plan that I was going to graduate from undergraduate school as an engineer and proceed right into that field. Yet, when it came time to choose the school I wanted to attend, I was not quite sure that was the right fit for me. So, I chose the University of Wisconsin-Superior and decided I was going to go to school for chemistry. After taking a couple political science and law classes, I knew I had to change my path. That was when I decided I needed to switch majors and pursue a different path. Although the advisors at my school were not supportive of this switch (they suggested business), I knew I needed to do what I wanted.

Once I started in the field I knew I wanted to study for the rest of my life – law and politics – I knew I would enjoy it. From that point on, I knew I wanted to pursue a Juris Doctorate to practice law, but I knew I also wanted to teach at a high level. I want to teach political science related courses to students who were like me. I want them to know that it is okay to want to major in majors that are not immediate job sources and that it's okay to major in majors that require more work to get where you want.

Because of the McNair Program at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, I've not only grown as a person, but as a researcher as well. I'm more certain about the path I want my life to take. Without this amazing opportunity, I do not believe I would know or be prepared for what lies ahead in my life regarding additional schooling. It's given me the ability to meet new people, the ability to want to study and further my education at a higher learning institution. All I have to do is get accepted.

As a McNair Scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, I conducted research on mediation style under the guidance of Dr. Maria Waltzer Bryant Cuzzo. I chose mediation style as my primary focus because of my interest in alternative dispute resolution. So many people are starting to get away from litigation and are moving to other means of solving problems arising with the law. Through my research, I've focused on how mediation style affects the mediation process. From my research, I have seen the many different aspects of how mediation style affects the mediator themselves. They all have different opinions that seem to show how the field of mediation is not set in stone and how it is heavily dependent on those involved in it.

ALUMNI
TERRI HOLM
Social Work



I am writing in regards to my experience with the McNair Scholars Program at University of Wisconsin-Superior. I feel this important program was vital in helping me make the decision to obtain a Master's degree in Community Practice Social Work. One of my greatest accomplishments was being an McNair Scholar and doing researching on "Sex Trafficking in the Twin Ports." This research was important because it made people aware of the problem and that services were needed for trafficked women and girls.

I would like to acknowledge Susan Holm, who was Director of the McNair Scholars Program at the time and Dr. Marsha Lue, who is currently the Director. Their encouragement and outstanding leadership helped and guided me through the process of preparing for graduate school. In addition, learning about Dr. Ronald E. McNair's story was an inspiration to continue my education. I believe getting my research published helped me get into graduate school, not to mention it strengthened my research skills. To this day I still love to research.

Currently, I am the Supervisor/Aide of the Alternative Learning Academic Center (ALAC) at Hayward High School in Hayward, Wisconsin. I work with at-risk students in detention for behavioral problems, the majority are American Indian. As an American Indian I can relate to them and understand their struggles. I encourage students to show up and do their best so they can graduate on time from high school, and to continue their education after graduation. Recently, I was given the added responsibility of monitoring the Senior Honors Study Labs. These seniors have at least a 2.5 G.P.A., good attendance and have the privilege of leaving school campus.

I am forever grateful for the learning experience in the McNair Scholars Program and highly recommend the program to the students I work with. It is my hope the McNair Scholars Program will be around for decades to come for low income, underrepresented and first generation students.

ALUMNI
LORANZIE (L.J.) ROGERS
Biological Life Sciences



Growing up in a rural area of Minnesota can be challenging, especially when you are one of the only students that comes from an underrepresented minority group. Throughout much of grade school, I faced many adversities due to the preconceived ideas many individuals had based on my cultural background. However, these challenges did not stop me from pursuing a college education.

Upon the completion of high school, I went on to attend the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD), where I began my studies in the biological life sciences. During the beginning of my undergraduate education, I not only had to balance my course work, but also a full-time job in order to fund my education. During my sophomore year of college, I grew a strong bond to one of my professors and now mentor, Dr. Allen Mensinger. Dr. Mensinger, a McNair advisor for the University of Wisconsin Superior (UW-S) McNair Program, recognized my passion for science and urged me to consider applying for the Ronald E. McNair Program. Following Dr. Mensinger's advice, I applied to the UW-S Program with Dr. Mensinger serving as my advisor.

In November of 2015, I was informed that I had been accepted to the UW-S McNair Program. This acceptance, allowed me the opportunity to give up my full-time job and focus primarily on my course work and conducting research with Dr. Mensinger at UMD. Immediately, the McNair Program was able to provide support for my first independent research project investigating the visual sensitivity differences in two species of Lake Superior fishes, which provided information on how different fishes rely on the light available in their environment. Additionally, the McNair Program also provided me with support to present this research at the National American Fisheries Society meeting during the summer of 2016.

The support from the McNair program did not stop there. After the completion of my first research project, they then provided me with support to travel with Dr. Mensinger to the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) in Woods Hole, MA to conduct neuro electrophysiology research on marine fishes. During this summer at the MBL, I was able to design and fabricate a 3D printed micromanipulator, which was able to increase the neural recording time in fishes 10-fold. The results of this research would eventually lead to my first first-author publication, which was published in the Journal of Neuroscience Methods. Additionally, the McNair program was once again able to provide me with support to present this

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research at the 2017 Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology Meeting.

During the fall of my senior year at UMD, I began to apply for graduate programs. Having received GRE and graduate school application preparation support from McNair, I was well prepared for this task. Due to the research support of McNair, I was an applicant that jumped off the page to many of the graduate programs I applied to. When applying to the Integrated Biological Sciences (IBS) Master's program at the University of Minnesota Duluth, I was nominated for the Diversity of Views and Excellence (DOVE) fellowship for having had a well-developed research background. Upon receiving my acceptance to the IBS program, I was also notified that I had received the DOVE fellowship, which has provided full support for the first year of my graduate studies at UMD. Receiving my acceptance to the program and of the fellowship were both great honors as I was the first African-American student to be accepted to the program since it began over 10 years ago, and the first in the program to have received this prestigious fellowship.

Countless times, the McNair program has provided me with support to further both my education and research skills. Upon entering UMD, I would never have thought that I would be where I am today. Upon the completion of my Master's in the IBS program at UMD, where I am investigating the effects of anthropogenic noise of marine fishes, I will be continuing my education in pursuit of my Ph.D. to study neuroethology in marine fishes. I am extremely grateful for the opportunities the McNair Program and its mentors have provide me with thus far. Recognizing this, I hope to one day be able to become a mentor within the McNair Program and provide support and mentoring to young underrepresented students, so they too may be able to pursue their passions.



ALUMNI
JOHN ADLER
English/Literature



In 2009, I spent 40 days in jail and another 2 months in a halfway house/treatment facility on The Red Cliff Ojibwe Reservation in northern Wisconsin. The incarceration and treatment were a result of an alcohol-related offense during a period of probation. Simply put, I wasn't doing that well in life.

Within a year of my release, I followed the suggestions of my father, who had always wanted to see me finish a college degree. Enrolling at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, I learned of the McNair Scholarship Program and duly applied.

Following the excellent advice from the McNair staff and my faculty mentor, I was able to finish a graduate-level research project. Due to the encouragement of my mentor Deborah Schlacks, PhD, and the McNair program staff, especially Marsha Lue, EdD, I submitted an abstract of my work on F. Scott Fitzgerald and the emerging automobile industry to an international academic conference. I was honored to receive an invite to participate. I found it very strange, in a comforting kind of way, standing before a room full of PhDs instead of another judge.

It's a much longer story, but the McNair program was probably the biggest factor in my life's trajectory in the last 25 years. Although I haven't yet gone on to graduate school, Ronald McNair's legacy has allowed me to shoot for the stars in my own way. The program's design of stretching possibilities helped me harness my own desires in more constructive ways. Since graduating from UW-Superior, I've worked exclusively as a free-lance writer and more recently as a performing artist, making my living this way.

About to embark on a multi-state tour with an employee, I can only imagine how much smaller my dreams would have been without the earnest encouragement of the McNair program and the staff that continues to help others traverse self-imposed limitations.

I wouldn't be where I am without them. The examples they set for me and others are keys I've used to open new doorways into endeavors that seek to contribute to community while feeding my own sense of destiny.

BRITTANY PUFALL

Psychology



My name is Brittany Pufall, and I am a 27 year-old Senior at the University of Wisconsin-Superior. I graduated from Superior High School in 2008, and after graduating I continued my education at UWS for three years. During that time, I completed all of my general education requirements. Additionally, I switched my major several times. After three years of not knowing what I wanted to do, I decided to take some time off from school. I made the decision to return to school in the Fall of 2017. I expect to graduate in December 2018 with my Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology.

My two experiences at UWS have been vastly different. The first time I was here, I occasionally came to a class, left as soon as it was done, and wasn't interested in being apart of school. This time, I spend the majority of my day on campus, studying and doing homework, and I have made an effort to talk to my professors when I have questions. Even applying for the McNair is something I never would have seen myself doing in the past.

The McNair is an amazing opportunity that will benefit me in so many ways. First, it is giving me the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone and challenge me in new ways. I will be going to events, conducting my first research project, and presenting my results to different audiences. Second, it is going to help me determine if research is something that I have a passion for. At this point in time, I am unsure if I want to pursue a Master's or Doctoral Degree, and the McNair Scholars Program will help me determine if this is what I would like to do in the future. Lastly, and most importantly, the McNair Scholars Program is giving me the opportunity to be a part of something bigger. It is going to make my experience at UWS more meaningful, as I will be conducting research on a topic that is of interest to me, as well as meeting many new people who are passionate about their work. I look forward to learning and growing through this program.