

THE ACADEMIC SPOTLIGHT

“The Doctor”

McNair Scholars Program

Wichita State University

Division of Campus Life and University Relations

webs.wichita.edu/mcnair

October - November, 2007

Vol. 13 No. 1

Notes From the Director

Congratulations and welcome to the McNair Scholars Program 2007 -2008 year, “*The Academic Spotlight*.” I am looking forward to getting to know each one of you. There have been some changes made to the Program curriculum that will assist you to better prepare for graduate school. I encourage you, to take personal responsibility in your own success, utilize your resources and take account of the things that you deem most important in your life. Myself and Shukura are here to help you, but you and you alone are the “Captain of Your Destiny.” Any and everything that you want to achieve, you can. I encourage you to set goals for yourself, write them down and periodically go back and revisit them. Outline how you will reach those goals by setting mini-goals or milestones along the way that will help you to reach your destiny. Yes, each of you has the goal or dream of attaining a PhD, but McNair is a mini-goal or milestone to what lies ahead. Go back and look at the goal selection sheet that was completed at orientation, how are you doing at reaching the goals that you set in August? Maybe you need to step back and refocus or maybe you are right on target? Whatever the case may be, you make the decision about what the next step should be. Take charge, dream big, move forward and do great things, you are in “*The Academic Spotlight*.”

It is my pleasure to serve as your director. I am here to assist you in any way that I can, but when you come, I will ask, “What are doing to help yourself?”

LaWanda Holt-Fields,
Director

“Education is not preparation for life--education is life itself.”

~John Dewey

Happy Birthday!

The staff would like to wish a Happy Birthday to those who are celebrating birthdays during the months of October & November.



Skylar Joyner - 10/3
Roni Ayalla - 10/6
Danielle Andrews - 10/8
Dr. Ronald E. McNair 10/12

Hats Off to You!

The staff would like to extend a hearty congratulations to all McNair Programs that were refunded for the 2007 - 2011 grant cycle.

Keep up the great work in assisting and serving students.

~ Celebrate ~

National Hispanic Heritage Month

September 15 - October 15

&

Native American Heritage Month

November





Grammatically Speaking

Conciseness In Writing

The goal of concise writing is to use the most effective words. Concise writing does not always have the fewest words, but it always uses the strongest ones. Writers often fill sentences with weak or unnecessary words that can be deleted or replaced. Words and phrases should be deliberately chosen for the work they are doing. Like bad employees, words that don't accomplish enough should be fired. When only the most effective words remain, writing will be far more concise and readable.

Below you will find general concise tips followed by very specific strategies for pruning sentences.

1. Replace several vague words with more powerful and specific words.

Often, writers use several small and ambiguous words to express a concept, wasting energy to express ideas better relayed through fewer specific words. As a general rule, more specific words lead to more concise writing. Because of the variety of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, most things have a closely corresponding description. Brainstorming or searching a thesaurus can lead to the word best suited for a specific instance. Notice that the examples below actually convey more as they drop in word count.

Wordy: Working as a pupil under someone who develops photos was an experience that really helped me learn a lot. (20 words)

Concise: Working as a photo technician's apprentice was an educational experience. (10 words)

2. Interrogate every word in a Sentence.

Check every sentence to make sure that it is providing something important and unique to a sentence. If words are dead weight, they can be deleted or replaced. For example:

Wordy: The teacher demonstrated some of the various ways and methods for cutting words from my essay that I had written. (22 words)

Concise: The teacher demonstrated methods for cutting words from my essay. (10 words)

3. Combine Sentences.

Some information does not require a full sentence, and can easily be inserted into another sentence without any loss of its value.

Wordy: Ludwig's castles are an astounding marriage of beauty and madness. By his death, he had commissioned three castles. (18 words)

Concise: Ludwig's three castles are an astounding marriage of beauty and madness. (11 words)

Source: <http://owl.wnenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resources/572/01/>

McNair Welcomes the 2007 - 2008 Participants

The McNair Scholars Program is off to a great start for the 2007 - 2008 grant year. This year, the Program has made some changes. Sophomores are now participants, which has increased the number of scholars that will be served. Also, the curriculum has been changed to better accommodate students to enhance their writing skills for research activities as well as assist them in preparing and applying to graduate school.

* indicates returning students

| | |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| * Temperance Acquistapace | Danielle Andrews |
| Roni Ayalla | Krystal Brack |
| Parker Daniel | Valerie Denney |
| Christina Eaves | Keisha Ezerendu |
| * Kimberly Grimes | Margery Hannah |
| Steven Hernandez | Jade Hudson |
| Diane Jefferson | Skylar Joyner |
| Kristal McGhee | * Philip Pettis |
| * Mikki Phan | Shannon Ray |
| Adella Rucker | * Cynthia Salas |
| Maria Silvers | * Tayoni Scott |
| Shondella Umeh | Jesse Valdez |
| Darnell Webb | John Williams |

~~~~~  
*“Knowledge is power and  
 enthusiasm pulls the switch.”*

~Steve Droke  
 ~~~~~


Avoiding “Plague” Words and Phrases

As students begin to complete their research projects and write their manuscripts, they need to avoid the following words and phrases to improve the quality of their sentences:

- **and/also**: This is often redundant.
- **and/or**: Use one or the other.
- **etc.**: Suggests laziness. Try writing one more example.
- **he/she**: Is used to prevent gender bias, but is generally used too often. Try using *he* or *she* or pluralize (where appropriate) so you can avoid the problem of gender-specific pronouns altogether.
- **got**: Many writers regard *got* as an ugly word. If you can avoid writing it, do so.
- **had ought** or **hadn't ought**: Get rid of the auxiliary *had*. “You *ought* not to pester your sister that way.”
- **irregardless**: No one word will get you into trouble [with the professor] faster than this one.
- **kind of** or **sort of**: Can be used in informal situations, but in formal academic writing, substitute *somewhat*, *rather* or *slightly*. “We were *rather* pleased with the results.”
- **lots and lots of**: In academic pros, avoid these colloquialisms when you can use *many* or *much*. Remember, when you do use these words, that lots of some thing countable are plural. Remember, too, that **a lot of** requires three words: “He spent *a lot of* money” (not alot of).
- **just**: Use only when you need it, as in *just* the right amount.
- **of**: Don't write would of, could of, should of when you mean *would have*, *could have*, *should have*.
- **suppose to, use to**: The hard “d” sound in *supposed to* and *used to* disappears in pronunciation, but it shouldn't disappear in spelling. “We *used to* do that” or “We were *supposed to* do it this way.”
- **very, really, quite (and other intensifiers)**
Like *basically*, these words seldom add anything useful. Try the sentence without them for improvement.

Events to Come

OCTOBER

- 7 **Grad Prep & Seminar**
2 - 3 p.m., Room 106, DV
“*Personal Statement Writing*”
- Research Assembly Meeting**
3 - 4 p.m., Library
“*Library Database Tour*”
- 18 - 19 **Fall Break**
- 26 **McNair Academy**
2 - 3 p.m., Room 106, DV
“*Mentoring Relationships*”
- 3 - 4 p.m., McNair Computer lab
“*Communication Fitness*”
- 27 **Grad Prep & Seminar**
10 - Noon, Room 106, DV
“*Lifestyles of People with Doctorates*”
- 31 **Research Mentor Orientation**

NOVEMBER

- 2 **Grad Prep & Seminar**
2 - 3 p.m., Room 106, DV
“*Me, Myself & Graduate School*”
- Research Assembly Meeting**
3 - 4 p.m. Room 106, DV
“*The Literature Review*”
- 10 **Grad Prep & Seminar**
12 - Noon, Room 106, DV
“*How to Finance Graduate School*” &
“*Application/Admissions Process*”
- 16 **McNair Academy**
2 - 3 p.m., McNair Lab
“*Career Exploration for the PhD*”
- 22 - 23 **Thanksgiving Recess**
- 30 **Grad Seminar**
2 - 3 p.m., McNair Lab
“*Applying to Graduate School*”

Someone Like me?



STEPHON H. S. ALEXANDER, PhD **Cosmologist: Penn State University**

Stephon Alexander was born on the southern coast of Trinidad and Tobago and moved to the Bronx in New York when he was eight. His interest in physics started four years later when his father brought home a used computer. In his quest to learn how it worked, he discovered the words 'Quantum Mechanics.' "Although I was mystified by the equations," he says, "I got hooked." This interest carried through to high school. However, in the Bronx, where the drop-out rate was 60 percent, a guidance counselor declined to give Alexander an application to an Ivy League university. "You won't get in," Alexander recalls the counselor saying. But Alexander, set out to prove the counselor wrong and obtained a BS at Haverford College, a Ph.D. in Physics from Brown University, along with a post doctorate from Stanford University. It appears the counselor had gotten it wrong. After his Ph.D., Quantum mechanics is now a part of Alexander's daily life as an assistant professor of physics, astronomy, and astrophysics at Penn State University. His research explores the interface between fundamental physics and cosmology, and in particular addresses questions about the early universe. He plays the saxophone, and his passion for improvisational Jazz influences his work.

CONCHA GOMEZ, PhD **Mathematician: University of Wisconsin, Madison**



Concha Gomez was born Italian and Cuban-American and grew up in the Midwest. She found it difficult to find mentors, or even friends, who were of a mixed cultural heritage. After graduating from high school she moved to a more diverse area and began college at the University of Wisconsin. Madison proved to be a bit more diverse, yet it still was not enough for Gomez. She still felt out of place, and soon dropped out of college and moved to California, where suddenly the whole world opened up. However, the process of getting through college at a university seemed nearly impossible early on because of her lack of support from home. Her father had encouraged her brothers tremendously and helped them pay their tuition, but he refused to give her a dime. In the end, she was forced to wait until she was in her mid-twenties to be considered financially independent so she could apply for financial aid with or without any help from her family.

It was not until Gomez moved to California that she realized how much diversity, or rather the lack of diversity, had affected her growing up. However, even in California, there were few women, especially Latina women in the field of mathematics. It did not even occur to Gomez that mathematics was an area she could thrive in until she took a community college calculus course in San Francisco. She received such good grades and seemed to enjoy the work so much that her peers began to enquire about her plans for a four-year university. When she told them she had not given college much serious thought, they were astounded. Eventually some older student friends convinced her to give college [one more try.] Finally she was being told, "Of course you can!" instead of "Why would someone like you be interested in that?" Soon Gomez began to look into University of California, Berkeley, and in time, she was accepted.

While Gomez's goals and passions in mathematics seemed to be finally coming into view, she still didn't have many mentors in the field encouraging her to thrive. However, upon getting into graduate school she did not focus on obtaining a PhD. What mattered was that she learned as much as she could. By setting small goals, she was eventually able to overcome the large obstacles that were set before her. Today, Gomez is an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where she teaches and heads the Wisconsin Emerging Scholars Program. She feels it is important to mentor because it was something she never had. She offers support to students who may not have it and helps to define their goals and objectives that may not yet be clear--all they need is determination to carry them the rest of the way.

GRAD-CONNECT

When Life Interferes with School

Most graduate students do not have the luxury of being able to focus all their energy and time solely on their studies. Many have jobs, families and other commitments that vie for their attention, and it can be difficult to strike a balance. But if you find yourself suffering from burnout, you can find ways to overcome or at least mitigate the challenges you face in graduate school.

Be Good to Yourself

One of the keys to balancing life and school is learning to deal with stress in a healthy way. It is important to take care of yourself, speak with family members and be specific about how they can help. Explain to them how important your education is, as well as how it will benefit the entire family. Taking care of yourself involves ensuring that you are getting adequate rest and nutrition. It also involves maintaining a positive attitude and appreciating the things that are going right in your life. Don't be your own worst enemy. If you are tired, hungry and jaded, it is hard to stay focused on your studies. Even if you think you have no room in your schedule for anything else, don't forget to pencil in some leisure time.

Think of graduate school as a job, rather than as school. In graduate school, students have much more control over how much they learn and are expected to take initiative in their own learning, much like someone would do on the job. Students who may have done just enough to "get by" in undergraduate work may find that they have to delve a lot deeper into their education. Developing adequate methods of dealing with stress from balancing life and school, involves recognizing weaknesses, utilizing strengths and employing outside sources.

Assemble Your Support Network

Don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help. There may be helpful seminars sponsored by the graduate services office at your school, as well as study groups to join. Talk to your classmates and find out how they manage their responsibilities, they can understand. You are not alone. Also speak to your professors and advisor, as they have heard it all before and can give you advice on how to manage your time.

Finding a mentor can be of great assistance to you while you strive to balance all of your roles. Your mentor can be your advisor or a professor you trust. Perhaps you know someone else who has endured the same struggles while they were enrolled in graduate school. Mentors can help you remain realistic and stay on track. Sometimes it helps just to have someone to talk to about your troubles.

Make Changes

Reducing expectations for yourself can be a huge relief. You cannot be all things to all people. An example of reducing expectations can be letting the housework go during exam period. It is helpful to set small, manageable goals and work up from there, focusing on one thing at a time. Remember that it is not a race and that graduate school does not provide instant gratification.

If you feel you are not getting your schoolwork done because you are having a tough time balancing life and school, you need to give yourself some structure, and you need to maintain it. Graduate school does not necessarily dictate timelines for you as undergraduate work tends to do. As a graduate student, you must be a self-motivator and have the ability to set realistic goals and priorities.

Perhaps a change in your study environment is in order if you find yourself behind in your schoolwork. It is easy to experience role overload if you are studying in a place where your role as a student goes head-to-head with another of your roles. It is not likely that studying at the kitchen table in the afternoon is ideal if the kids are just getting home from school needing your attention. That being said, consider how rewarding it might feel to have "homework time," where you and your kids do your schoolwork at the same time. Balancing life and school is a skill, and while it may be difficult, it can be done.

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"The Doctor"

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3. Any University employee or student who in retaliatory conduct against a University employee or student who has filed a complaint alleging discrimination or otherwise exercised their rights and privileges against illegal discrimination will be subject to disciplinary actions pursuant to establish University procedures up to and including termination of employment or student status.
4. This prohibition against retaliatory conduct applies regardless of the merits of the initial complaint of illegal discrimination.

The McNair Scholars Program is funded through the US Department of Education, for \$252,045.

"Do right. Do your best. Treat others as you want to be treated."

~ Lou Holtz

In 1978, Ronald E. McNair was one of thirty-five applicants selected for the astronaut program from a pool of ten thousand. He was also nationally known for his work in the field of laser physics.

**McNair Facts
Did You Know?**



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