Westminster College McNair Scholars Program
Fall 2019 Highlights

Now in our 17th year of services, we are proud to highlight the achievements of our scholars:

Congratulations 2018 - 2019 graduates! From Westminster College: Abigail (Peterson) Angell, Destina Bermejo, Ashley Covarrubias, Kara Kornhauser, Jessica Taghvaeie, Valeria Villegas Medina. From the University of Utah: Estefanie Aguilar Padilla and David Hernandez.

Three of our new alumnae received the Arts and Sciences Outstanding Student Award from their major departments: Kara Kornhauser in Environmental Studies, Valeria Villegas Medina in Mathematics, and Jessica Taghvaeie in both Political Science and Spanish/ Latin American Studies. Kara also received the President’s Leadership Award at the spring commencement ceremony. Congratulations!!

We also extend our congratulations to the four new grads who start graduate school in fall 2019. Each of these young scholars is fully funded for their graduate programs. The degrees they seek, departments, and institutions are:

- **Estefanie Aguilar Padilla**: MS in Statistics (Econometrics track) at the University of Utah
- **Destina Bermejo**: MA in Latin American Studies at the University of Arizona
- **Kara Kornhauser**: MS in Biology and Wildlife at the University of Alaska Fairbanks
- **Jessica Taghvaeie**: PhD in Political Science at the University of California, Irvine

Additionally, Valeria Villegas Medina has started the Washington University Joint Post-Baccalaureate Program in Physics; the program provides a stipend and tuition waiver.

Other grad school news: In January, 2019, Glory Stanton (U of U 2018) entered the Vanderbilt University master’s program in Medicine, Health, and Society. In August 2019, Amarina Chavez (Westminster 2018) embarked on her longstanding dream to become a DDS (Doctor of Dental Surgery); she is now a first-year dentistry student at the University of Utah.

74% (115/156) of our graduates have attained an advanced degree and/or are currently in graduate programs.

Congratulations! to those who earned graduate degrees in the 2018 - 2019 academic year:

- **Abby Steven Arellanes (Westminster 2016)** received his MS in Sociology from North Carolina State University in July 2019.
- **Emma (Joseph) Moench (Westminster, December 2009)** received her Master in Community Leadership at Westminster College.
- **Chrono Nu (Westminster 2015)** has earned his master’s in Biomedical Engineering at the University of Michigan.
- **Carolina Silva (Westminster 2014)** received her PhD in Cultural Studies and Social Thought in Education from Washington State University.

Congratulations! to graduates for the following accomplishments:

- **Dr. Raquel Gabbitas Cowell (Westminster 2008)** was granted tenure in December 2018 and is now Associate Professor of Psychology at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin.
- **Dr. Nichole Garcia (U of U 2010)** is starting her second year as an assistant professor in the Rutgers Graduate School of Education. She continues to publish a regular column in *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*.
- **Dr. Sarah Janel Jackson (U of U 2005)** is now an Associate Professor and Presidential Professor in the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the first tenured Black woman in the Annenberg School.
- **Dr. August Mayai (U of U 2006)** was awarded a fellowship from the University of Oxford Department of International Development to research two projects: the impact of rural health program investment in Eastern
Africa on infant and child mortality, as well as the relationship between agricultural land size and productivity and the demand for family planning in Ethiopia. August is Director of Research at the Sudd Institute in the School of Public Service, University of Juba, South Sudan.

**Dr. Reece Peck's (Westminster 2004)** book *Fox Populism: Branding Conservatism as Working Class* was published earlier this year by Cambridge University Press.


**Jessica Taghvaeie (Westminster 2019)** was one of two recipients of the Alpha Chi Region VII Michael Flachmann Scholarship.

**PhD student Tashelle Wright (Westminster 2016)** won UC Merced’s first Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program Predoctoral Fellowship to examine tobacco use and oral health diseases among Black, Latinx, aging, and rural populations in the San Joaquin Valley.

**McNair Scholars answer: What have you gained from the McNair program?**

“My life was totally changed by this program. My family’s lives have been changed. I have gained access to a career path I didn’t know existed.”

“Support, knowledge, confidence. Without McNair I would not be going to grad school.”

“I have learned that I can get a PhD and deserve to be part of academic discussions and research.”

“I have gained so much more than I expected. I would not be heading to grad school this fall if I didn’t have the support of this program, and I am very grateful.”

“The program took all of the scary parts [of applying to graduate school] away by breaking down the process and making it more manageable.”

“They constantly reminded me that I deserve to be here, and gave me the tools to move forward.”

“The resources, workshops, and knowledge McNair has provided me are invaluable. I know that without the program I would not be attending graduate school.”

“Incredible opportunities, preparation for success in graduate school, lifelong friends, support, a family away from home, confidence, guidance, and wonderful memories. McNair services always exceeded my imagination.”

“The McNair program completely changed my undergraduate experience. Before, I doubted myself a lot and kept to my comfort zone. Since my McNair summer, I have gotten more involved not only academically, but in my community as well. McNair helped me understand myself and what I want to accomplish.”

“Before McNair, I had no idea what I needed to do to apply to grad school. This program not only taught me how to go through the steps to apply, but was with me throughout the journey making sure I would succeed.”

Our success is only possible with the support of faculty research mentors and instructors, workshop presenters, and staff across many departments at Westminster College, Salt Lake Community College, and the College of Southern Idaho. We are honored to continue serving our amazing students, and enormously grateful for the broad and deep support we receive from the administration, faculty, and staff of Westminster College.

*In FY 2019-20, the Westminster College McNair Scholars Program is funded at approximately $375,684. Of this amount, $265,684 (71%) is an annual grant from the U. S. Department of Education. Westminster College provides the remaining 29% by contributing over $110,000 of support each year.*