FALL | ISSUE 6

THE PHASE

The Our Lady of the Lake University McNair Scholars Program Newsletter



A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

By: Director Dr. Jessica M. Quintero

Hello Scholars,

We are incredibly grateful to announce that our funding has been released for the 2025-2026 academic year, ensuring we can continue serving scholars at OLLU. However, while we celebrate this victory, we must remain vigilant. The landscape of education is shifting, and the risk of losing funding in future years remains a serious reality; we are not entirely in the clear.

To secure the future of McNair and TRIO, your continued advocacy is essential. The most powerful tool we have against potential cuts is your success. Stakeholders and representatives need to see how this program changed your trajectory and how your achievements benefit your community. Please share your stories with us and your elected officials. Let's remind them that TRIO works and that this program is worth saving.

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SCHOLAR NEWS

Welcome SRI26

Karis Alcoser
Environmental Science & Sustainability

Francisco Barraza Segura
Computer Information Systems & Security

Clarissa Briones
Communication Science & Disorders

Nayeli Cordova
Education & Mathematics

Jacqueline Gloria
Social Work

Emilio Gutierrez
Psychology
Theology & Environmental Sciences

Larissa Ortega
Psychology

Yezenia Perez
Kinesiology

Star Sanchez
Psychology & Social Work

Sofia Santacruz
Psychology
Environmental Science



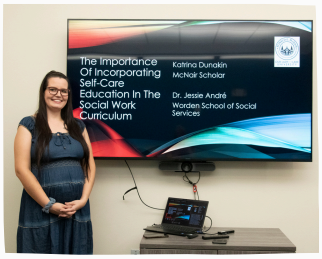
Pictured from Left to Right: Nayeli Cordova, Sofia Santacruz, Jacqueline Gloria, Star Sanchez, Yezenia Perez, Karis Alcoser, Clarissa Briones, Francisco Barraza Segura, and Larissa Ortega.

SCHOLAR NEWS

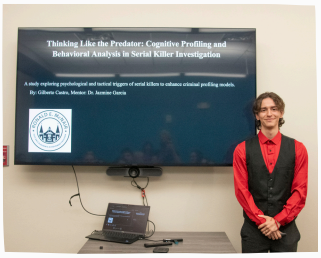
SRI25 Highlights

2025 University of New Mexico McNair Scholars Conference

SRI25 scholars attended the 2025 University of New Mexico McNair Scholars Conference in Albuquerque where they presented their research alongside peers from across the nation. Scholars presented their work via a 12-minute oral presentation format and were allotted three minutes to answer questions. Evaluators also attended their presentations and provided scholars with valuable feedback that provided a rigorous learning process. Scholars also benefited from excellent networking opportunities, attended a graduate school fair, and took free professional headshot photos.



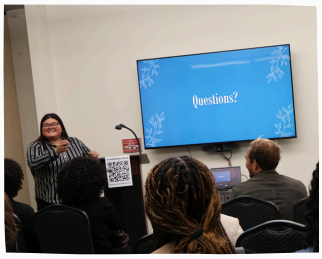










Scholars embraced and experienced the diverse traditions of New Mexico with cultural activities by touring Old Town Albuquerque, indulging in New Mexican cuisine, ascending 10,378 feet through the Sandia Mountains in an aerial tramway, and experiencing a flamenco dance performance.



RONALD E. McNAIR POST BACCALAUREATE ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

OUR LADY OF THE LAKE UNIVERSITY

SCHOLAR NEWS

Undergraduate Research Symposium

The Fall 2025 Undergraduate Research Symposium showcased 37 research projects from Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) across a wide range of academic disciplines.

The Ronald E. McNair Scholars program, in collaboration with dedicated faculty and staff, prepare and guide undergraduate students as they develop their research findings. Through mentoring, structured workshops, and hands-on support, students learn how to refine their research question, gather and analyze data, and translate their work into a clear and compelling poster presentation for the symposium. This platform allows students to share their presentation and communication skills, provides opportunities for students to receive constructive feedback, engage in meaningful dialogue, and collaborate with the academic community. The symposium also strengthens critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills, as students learn to ask questions, evaluate evidence, and present their findings effectively. Such experiences not only deepen students' understanding of their academic disciplines but also build confidence and resilience. This semester, The Undergraduate Research Symposium was held at MAIN 311 and included two rounds of presentations, a resource fair, and concluded with poster awards and pictures. Senior Bethany Garr was presented with the STEM Award for her poster presentation titled, Understanding the Effects of Varying Light Intensity on Coral Bleaching Using the Cnidarian Model System Aiptasia. Junior Annabelle Prindle was presented with the HABS Award for her poster presentation titled, Saint-Therese and Public Religiosity. Seniors Jasmine Hernandez, Yami Zamarripa, and Jose Saucedo were recognized for the People's Choice Award for their poster presentation titled, The effects of Music Tempo on Walking Cadence on Reaction Time, Agility, and Cognitive Speed.



SCHOLAR NEWS

Undergraduate Research Symposium cont.

A special thank you to all the faculty and staff members who made this possible: Professor Adam Bynum, Ms. Aysel Bakhishova, Ms. Austin Bergstrom, Dr. Maria De la Cruz, Dr. Christopher Rose, Dr. Briana Salas, Dr. Emily Sauers, Ms. Maria Cabaniss, Dr. Stacy Evans, Dr. Anthony Fava, Dr. Bianca Goodrum, Dr. Liliana Gutierrez, Dr. Heather Herrera, Mr. Matthew Hernandez, Dr. Charlin Jones-Chavez, Dr. Chloe Lash, Dr. Guadalupe Marquez, Mr. Steven Perez, Dr. Christopher Rose, Dr. Alan Silva, Mr. Newman Wong, and Dr. Candace de Leon-Zepeda.



The next Undergraduate Research Symposium is scheduled to be held on April 22nd at the Sueltenfuss Library from 12pm – 2pm. To reserve your spot or for any inquiries, please email the McNair Scholars Program at mcnair@ollusa.edu.

McNair Scholar Selected to Serve as TABE BESO Representative

McNair Scholar Gabriela Guadarrama, has been selected to serve on the Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE) board. Guadarrama is an Education & Bilingual Certification for EC-6 major at Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU). Her research focuses on the lived experiences of future bilingual teachers as they engage in academic and professional development through a Bilingual Education Student Organization-BESO. She currently serves as the Treasurer for the BESO student organization at OLLU and was recently selected to serve as a TABE BESO Representative. “This position is incredibly meaningful to me because it allows me to give back to an organization that has shaped my journey as both a student and an educator,” shared Guadarrama. “Serving on the TABE board is more than a leadership opportunity; it is a responsibility to represent, support, and amplify the voices of those working toward educational equity and access for all students.”



Gabriela Guadrrama C/O ‘27

SCHOLAR NEWS

McNair Scholar Selected to Serve as TABE BESO Representative cont.

At this capacity, Guadarrama will represent the interests and concerns of BESO and ESL members and students who are seeking bilingual certification across the state of Texas. Through ongoing communication regarding legislative and policy changes that impact certification and written reports to the TABE House of Delegates, Guadarrama will contribute to uplifting the future of bilingual educators and expand opportunities for multilingual learners across communities.

FALL 2025 GRADUATES

Congratulations Class of 2025!

Four scholars have officially joined the distinguished community of Ronald E. McNair Alumni. Family, friends, and members of the OLLU community gathered to honor their achievements, celebrating not only their graduation but also the dedication, resilience, and hard work that brought them to this milestone. The ceremony recognized their scholarly accomplishments, growth as emerging researchers, and commitment to pursuing graduate education.



Pictured from Left to Right: Briana Rodriguez, Katrina Dunakin, McNair Director Dr, Jessica Quintero, Adriana Guerrero, Valeria Pena

FALL 2025 GRADUATES

Congratulations Class of 2025!



Katrina Dunakin, BA in Social Work

While in the program, Katrina served as PI for her study, "Self-Care and Burnout Education in Social Work Curriculum." Her work was accepted for presentation at both the Baylor and New Mexico National McNair Scholars Research Conferences.

Katrina will take time with her new born baby Aurora, then enroll in a MSW program Fall of 2026.



Adriana Guerrero, BS in Kinesiology

While in the program, Adriana served as PI for her study, "The Relationship between Handgrip Strength and Cardiovascular Risk Factors in Older Women." Her work was accepted for presentation at the UCLA, Baylor, Atlanta, New Mexico National McNair Scholars Research Conferences, and UTSA's Summer Undergraduate Research Conference.

Adriana will continue to complete pre-requisites necessary for enrollment into an OTD program.



Valeria Peña, BA in Marketing

While in the program, Valeria served as PI for her study, "Harnessing AI for Marketing Insights: A Mixed-Methods Approach to Predictive Accuracy and Language Analysis." Her work was accepted for presentation at Baylor's National McNair Scholars Research Conference.

Valeria will begin working for a non-profit organization in marketing and communication then enroll in a Ph.D. program in the Fall of 2026.



Briana Rodriguez, BA in Psychology

While in the program, Briana served as PI for her study, "Divorced Parents' Impact on Latinx First Generation Female Students." Her work was accepted for presentation at both the New Mexico and Baylor's National McNair Scholars Research Conferences, and UTSA's Summer Undergraduate Research Conference.

Briana will pursue a Masters in Clinical Mental Health Counseling this Fall 2026.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

First-Gen Fest 2025

First-Generation Students at Our Lady of the Lake University celebrated their achievements this fall at the 6th Annual First-Gen Fest! National First-Gen Week is celebrated annually on November 8, commemorating the signing of the Higher Education Act of 1965 that created federal financial aid programs to support first-generation college students. Student organizations, faculty, staff, alumni, and family members came together to honor the identities, contributions, and hard work of first-gen students with free games, food, fun, prizes, resources, and community! This years theme was "Roll with a Purpose," and various student organizations participated to show their support. Thank you to everyone who made this possible: McNair Scholars Program, Tri-Alpha Honor Society, San Antonio McNair (SAM), Career Services, TAFE, University Ministry, OLLU Advising, Kappa Delta Chi, Accessibility Services, OLLU PD, Counseling & Wellness, Academic Center for Excellence, Delta Xi Nu Sorority, BESO, Students for Sustainability, OLLU Sueltenfuss Library, and The Presidents Office.















COMMUNITY EVENTS

Texas Three Minute Thesis Competition (3MT)

The Third Annual Texas Three Minute Thesis (3MT) Competition took place at Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) on November 7th and 8th. OLLU Alum, Noel Cortez, Ph.D., brings together graduate students from across the state to showcase their research in a friendly competition. This year, the competition was expanded to include undergraduate students, offering a space for them to deliver and further develop their research presentation skills. Participants compete by sharing their research in just three minutes with one static slide for a chance to win cash prizes. Undergraduate participants included: Gabriela Guadarrama, Annika Litterio, and Valeria Pena. This year, the Graduate Division winners were: First place Adam Trupp,









3MT at Our Lady of the Lake University Sueltenfuss Library

The University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB), second place Peace Okeke, UT Health San Antonio, and third place Ahniyah Perry, OLLU. Undergraduate Recognition: Funke Olayinka, The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), Zoe Bautista, UTSA, and Kristen Padilla Trinity University.

San Antonio Zoo Presentation and Tour

Scholars ended the Fall 2025 semester with a wild adventure at the San Antonio Zoo! The visit included a tour, presentation, and discussion of research currently being conducted at our local zoo. Scholars explored educational efforts with zoo experts and experienced wildlife from diverse ecosystems around the world. They also met with a member of the Conservation Research team, who shared insights on planning and best-practice efforts for the new addition of Congo Falls; an immersive habitat that will be the new home for seven gorillas. Scholars explored the zoo grounds and tried to get a sneak peek at the gorillas, as the grand opening was scheduled only two days after their visit. The Education Coordinator of School and Community Engagement spoke to the various internships and research opportunities that are available to scholars. Internships allow students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in their respective fields.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

San Antonio Zoo













ALUMNI NEWS

Graduation

CONGRATULATIONS
Dr. Ana Victoria Quintero
Recent graduate of the Baylor University



Dr. Ana Victoria Quintero (C/O 18)

Dr. Ana Victoria Quintero C/O ‘18, earned her PhD in Chemistry with a specialization in Analytical Chemistry from Baylor University in August 2025. Her doctoral dissertation, “Advancing the Characterization of Glycan Dynamics with In-Electrospray Ionization Hydrogen/Deuterium Exchange-Mass Spectrometry”, focused on developing and applying mass spectrometry-based methods for the analysis of carbohydrates, a class of molecules with essential roles in biological function. Using in-electrospray ionization hydrogen/deuterium exchange-mass spectrometry (in-ESI HDX-MS), she rapidly labeled and structurally characterized carbohydrate isomers. Since many carbohydrate isomers share identical chemical compositions, distinguishing them remains a major analytical challenge. Her work aimed to develop new methodologies to study carbohydrate dynamics, which are crucial for understanding structure-function relationships. Dr. Quintero is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at UT Health San Antonio, where she focuses on spatial metabolomics to advance kidney disease research. Her work utilizes matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization mass spectrometry imaging (MALDI-MSI) and liquid chromatography/mass spectrometry (LC-MS) to analyze the metabolic composition of kidney tissue. By mapping the spatial distribution of metabolites directly on tissue sections, she aims to identify molecular biomarkers associated with kidney disease progression. Her research aims to improve early detection and treatment strategies for kidney disease.

TRIO
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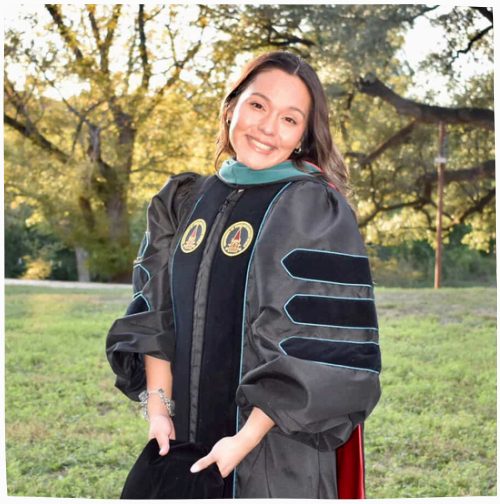
ALUMNI NEWS

Graduation

CONGRATULATIONS
Dr. Kaitlyn M. Salazar
Recent graduate of the University of the Incarnate Word



Dr. Kaitlyn M. Salazar (C/O 21)

Kaitlyn Salazar earned her Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology from Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) in 2021, where she was a dedicated student-athlete on the college softball team and a recognized McNair Scholar. She further advanced her education by completing her Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) from the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) in 2025.
During her doctoral studies, Kaitlyn demonstrated a commitment to evidence-based practice and clinical education. She actively participated in research teams and led in service meetings for her peers and faculty on crucial physical therapy topics. These educational sessions focused on integrating the latest evidence into practice, including: Pain Neuroscience Education (PNE): Presenting on effective strategies for managing chronic pain by utilizing PNE to help patients understand the biological and psychological factors contributing to persistent pain, ultimately empowering them to change their relationship with pain. Clinical Practice Guidelines (CPGs) for Congenital Muscular Torticollis: Reviewing and presenting the current CPGs to ensure optimal assessment and intervention techniques for infants and children with torticollis, highlighting the importance of early diagnosis and standardized care. These contributions underscore Kaitlyn's dedication not only to mastering complex concepts but also to translating research into actionable clinical knowledge. Kaitlyn now serves the San Antonio community, practicing part-time at an outpatient orthopedic clinic under a temporary license. She is currently preparing for her board certification examination at the end of January. In her clinical role, she is gaining valuable experience treating a diverse range of populations and specialties in orthopedic physical therapy, applying her knowledge in pain science and standardized care to improve patient outcomes.

ALUMNI NEWS

Published Scholars



Jessica Corona C/O '23

McNair Scholar Alum, Jessica Corona C/O '23, co-authored a research article titled, "Border Women Literature and Feminist Cartographies: Student Approaches to Dataset and Visualization Development for Gender-Based Violence Documentation," in the Wiley Online Library database. In collaboration with Niloufar Esmaeili (PhD English), and Jasbeth Medrano (Political Science Undergraduate), their research focuses on gender violence and transnational feminist movements. Access the article at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sgp2.70025



From Left to Right: Dr. Melissa Brennan, and Alyna Guerrero C/O '24

McNair Scholar Alum, Alyna Guerrero, C/O '24, co-authored research article titled, "Marianismo Beliefs and Mental Health Help-Seeking Attitudes Among College-Aged Latinas," in the North American Journal of Psychology. Co-authored with Melissa A. Brennan Ph.D., the study "investigates the complex interplay between marianismo beliefs and mental health help-seeking attitudes among college-aged Latinas." To learn more and to access the article visit: ProQuest Database

Texas Tech University Health Science Center Psychology Fellow

Kevin Rodriguez, Ph.D., C/O '16 recently started a new position as a Psychology Fellow with the Department of Psychiatry at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso. As a Psychology Fellow, Dr. Rodriguez provides bilingual psychotherapy, crisis intervention, assessment, and consultation across several clinics, including adult outpatient clinic and school-based telehealth services for children and adolescents through statewide mental health initiatives. His role centers on increasing access to mental health care for underserved communities in the borderland region and supporting families navigating complex cultural and socioeconomic stressors. In addition to serving the community, Dr. Rodriguez is involved in ongoing research with the Psychiatry Department Southwest Brain Bank at Texas Tech University Heath Sciences Center El Paso, where he collaborates on studies examining suicide risk factors as BMI, brain weight, and method-specific

ALUMNI NEWS

Texas Tech University Health Science Center Psychology Fellow cont.

differences among decedents. When asked how the McNair Program has helped him in his professional career, Dr. Rodriguez shared, "My research is grounded in the strong research foundation I developed through McNair, which prepared me for the advanced work I completed during my Ph.D. at Palo Alto University and my current collaborations at Texas Tech." During his time at Our Lady of the Lake University and as a McNair Scholar, Dr. Rodriguez was mentored by Kathryn B. Anderson, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology. "The



Dr. Kevin Rodriguez C/O '16

skills I developed in designing an IRB-approved study, collecting and analyzing data, writing for publication, and presenting at conferences directly supported my dissertation and continue to inform my work as a clinician and researcher," shared Dr. Rodriguez. "McNair also provided the community and confidence I needed as a first-generation scholar, helping me see myself as someone who belonged in academic and clinical spaces. Its values continue to guide my work: cultural humility, social justice, and community-centered care."

McNair Alumni Update Survey 2026

Calling ALL alumni!

Please take a few minutes to complete the Alumni Update Survey by scanning the QR code or selecting the CLICK HERE icon. Your feedback, continued support, and updates help the program continue to offer services for students in our community.

SCAN QR CODE OR

CLICK HERE

TO ACCESS THE 2026 ALUMNI SURVEY

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT *today!*

STAY CONNECTED

There are several ways to stay connected with us. Follow us on Instagram, tell us how you're doing, and contribute to our Scholar Support Fund. This fund is set up to offset costs accrued by scholars not covered by the Department of Education, such as professional organization and GRE fees. Share your talents; sign up as a coach, connector, speaker, advisory board member, etc., or simply tell us how you're doing! As a grant recipient, the Department of Education requires that we provide information on your progress to a Ph.D. Additionally, current scholars need to see what is possible for them, and it is important to celebrate your success! We want to highlight alumni in all future issues of *The Phase*.

You are always welcome to reach out via phone at 210-431-4099, email us at mcnair@ollusa.edu, or stop by our offices located in Lower Level Moye.



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