

The University of Texas at Austin | McNair Scholars | About the Program

McNair Scholars is part of the federally funded TRIO education programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education, and the only one primarily focused on students' postbaccalaureate success. Named in honor of astronaut, physicist, and saxophonist Dr. Ronald E. McNair, McNair Scholars was established by an act of Congress in 1989. UT-Austin has maintained its program since 2007. McNair Scholars seeks to increase the number of undergraduate students earning doctoral degree who are low-income and first-generation. For federally regulated definitions of these terms, see below.

Program participants must be committed to enrolling in graduate programs, with an end goal of successfully completing a Ph.D. Students selected to participate in UT's McNair Scholars work with both staff advisors (on graduate school literacy) and faculty mentors (on research and scholarship). Scholars define, develop, and deliver an independent research project. Scholars have access to a variety of resources, supports, and opportunities relating to graduate studies and academic professionalization. Scholars receive no-cost GRE prep, travel awards, scholarship aid, and research stipends. Actively engaged Scholars are eligible for up to several thousand dollars in financial support.

There are approximately 35 active Scholars on campus each year. UT's McNair program has an alumni network of nearly 300 Scholars. Over the past ten years, 30% of UT's McNair Scholar alumni have gone on to earn doctorates. (National Ph.D. obtainment hovers around 2%.)

The University of Texas at Austin | McNair Scholars | Structure & Timeline

McNair Scholars is designed as a **two-year commitment**. The strongest applicants are rising juniors (i.e., applying during sophomore year), though all students are encouraged to apply if serious about graduate studies.

For rising juniors admitted as Scholars, your commitment looks like this:

Junior Year

- Fall | *Research Methods* | A 3-credit course that helps Scholars examine and practice graduate-level research habits, including defining and refining their own research, developing a research proposal, and securing a faculty mentor.
- Spring | *Grad School Literacy* | A 1-credit course that helps Scholars explore key aspects of graduate school, including application processes, material development (e.g., CV, statement of purpose, recommendation letters), building peer communities and mentor relationships, and maintaining wellness.

Summer | between junior and senior years

- *Summer Research Institute* (SRI) that allows Scholars to conduct their independent research projects with guidance from their faculty mentors. Scholars receive funding as they complete components throughout the summer, including presenting at an academic conference. Scholars' SRI research is published in a dedicated UT McNair Research Journal.
- Live, online course that helps Scholars prepare for the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) that is required for most graduate school admissions.

- Travel to and attend “graduate school bootcamp” seminar, all costs covered.
- Travel to and present at a McNair Scholars academic conference, all costs covered.

Senior Year

- Fall semester | *Teaching Academy* | A 1-credit course that helps Scholars teach their research to undergraduates. Scholars craft a syllabus, design lessons, and practice teaching.

The University of Texas at Austin | McNair Scholars | Support & Funding

Every Scholar at UT has a 1) faculty mentor who supervises their research, and 2) McNair staff advisors who advance their graduate studies literacy. Advisors help Scholars navigate the graduate school process (i.e., selecting, applying, funding, attending, etc.). Mentors are invited by Scholars; Scholars choose mentors who can best help them complete their research.

Funding comes in two forms:

1. Costs the program can eliminate:
 - Code that reduces GRE registration fee by half
 - No-cost enrollment in summer GRE prep course
 - Letter that waives application fees of most programs for McNair Scholars
 - Scholarships that cover costs associated with campus visits and conference travel
 - Membership in professional organizations
 - Subscriptions to academic journals
 - Supplies essential to research completion
2. Funding for things you do as a McNair Scholar:
 - Submit a viable proposal
 - Submit a completed research article
 - Maintain and submit research logs
 - Scholarships for active engagement

Have a question not answered here? Please see FAQ below.

And please keep an eye on the McNair Scholars site for details on upcoming info sessions.

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The University of Texas at Austin | McNair Scholars | Frequently Asked Questions

Q: *How are “low income” and “first generation” defined for the purposes of McNair?*

A: As a federally funded program, McNair Scholars must follow mandated regulations relating to eligibility definitions set by the U.S. Department of Education.

The term “low income” means an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount. Qualifying income levels depend on the size of the family, and can change from year to year. For the most current levels, please see bit.ly/2UDE9SE.

A student is considered “first generation” if neither of their natural or adoptive parents received a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution of higher education in either the United States or another country. Students with older siblings who have earned bachelor's degrees are still considered first generation if neither of their parents have done so.

Q: *I am interested in a Ph.D. and need guidance about how to get there, but I'm not sure if I'm eligible for the program. Should I still apply?*

A: Yes! We have to adhere to strict eligibility requirements since we are federally funded, but even if you do not end up being eligible, we can still support you with guidance on research and graduate school, and also invite you to participate in certain events alongside the McNair cohort. We cannot award you funding if you do not meet the eligibility requirements for McNair, but we still want to support you in other ways! You may also be interested in resources and events provided by the Strive Grad Prep Academy (**LINK TBA**). Strive GPA helps students plan and prepare for postgraduate education.

Q: *Is McNair Scholars a good fit for students who are thinking about medical school, law school, and other professional degrees?*

A: Unfortunately, McNair is not the best fit for students who want to earn professional degrees like an MD or JD. If you're deciding between a professional degree and a doctoral degree that's understandable, but we prefer students who are seriously and purposefully leaning in the direction of a Ph.D. If you decide on either law or medical school, you may be interested in supports available from the Strive Grad Prep Academy.

Q: *How much research experience do I need to apply to McNair Scholars?*

A: The more, the better. But the program is also a good fit for students whose ambition to conduct research is bigger than their opportunities so far to actually do so. Again, if you're serious about graduate school and research-focused careers, we encourage you to apply, regardless of your research experience.

Q: *What kind of research can you do through McNair?*

A: Any and all kinds! There is no discipline requirement. McNair Scholars research everything from STEM to humanities to social sciences to education.

Q: *Can I start as a sophomore? As a senior? Do I have to be a junior to participate?*

A: If you're serious about research and graduate studies, you are encouraged to apply. If you start the program as either a rising sophomore (a little early) or rising senior (a little late), your timeline with the program will need adjusting. If you're willing to commit to the program, regardless of the timeline, we can make the program useful to you. For rising senior applicants, it is preferred that you come in with substantial prior research experience, since we will have less time to work with you. First-year students are not eligible to participate, and are encouraged to apply during their sophomore year.

Q: *Do I have to stay on campus for the Summer Research Institute?*

A: Most Scholars complete their research while on campus, working with their faculty mentor. Sometimes Scholars opt to conduct their research at another campus. Scholars working off campus work with McNair staff to determine expectations and support.

Q: *Why do I have to take the Teaching Academy?*

A: To fund their education, most graduate students serve as teaching assistants (TA) and assistant instructors (AI). Being comfortable developing and implementing a class before you have to actually teach will make this experience smoother, and may make you a more competitive applicant.

Q: *Can I still participate if I'll be studying abroad during my time with McNair?*

A: In most cases, we can accommodate students spending part of their junior or senior year abroad. You will work with your faculty mentor and McNair staff to make a plan. We will work with you to integrate McNair into your larger academic career, including internships, community service, leadership roles, etc. That said, the expectation is that your focus will remain on graduate studies and conducting research.

Q: *What happens if I change my mind about pursuing a Ph.D. while I'm in the program?*

A: Whether or not to pursue graduate studies is a big decision. Ultimately, that decision is yours to make. Whatever you decide, the McNair program will support you. But to be clear, the purpose of the program is to encourage you to pursue graduate studies, and to push you to your fullest academic potential. We will ensure you have everything needed to make an informed decision. The strongest applicants are those who can firmly and clearly demonstrate their interest and/or experience in doing research, and those who have a firm and clear idea of how graduate studies will benefit themselves and their communities. There is no penalty for changing your mind, but only those Scholars who are actively conducting research and pursuing graduate school are eligible to receive funding.