



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

McNair Scholars is a federally funded program that seeks to promote education equity and access. McNair Scholars is one of eight TRIO education programs housed in the U.S. Department of Education.

The mission of McNair Scholars is to increase the number of undergraduate students earning doctoral degrees who are low-income and first-generation, and/or who come from communities underrepresented in graduate education. For definitions of these terms, please see FAQ 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 McNair Scholars at UT work with both a faculty advisor (on graduate school literacy) and a faculty mentor (on research and scholarship). Scholars define, develop, and deliver an independent research project. Scholars have access to a variety of resources, supports, and opportunities to graduate studies and academic professionalization. Scholars are eligible for various forms of funding for engaged participation.

There are approximately thirty active Scholars on campus each year. UT's McNair program has an alumni network of over two hundred Scholars.

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

McNair Scholars is designed as a two-year commitment. Most applicants are rising juniors, but 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 semester | *Research Methods* (3-hour) course that helps Scholars explore research practices and define their own research.
- Spring semester | *Research Design* (1-hour) course that helps Scholars refine their research, develop a research plan, and secure a faculty mentor.

Summer | between junior and senior years

- *Summer Research Institute* (SRI) that allows Scholars to conduct their research project. Scholars receive funding as they complete components throughout the summer. Scholars' SRI research is published in a dedicated UT-Austin McNair Scholars Journal.

- *GRE Prep* course that helps Scholars study for the Graduate Record Examinations that is required for most graduate school admissions.

Senior Year

- Fall semester | *Teaching Academy* (1-hour) 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) a McNair advisor who develops their graduate studies literacy. Advisors are faculty on the McNair staff who work with Scholars to 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. Advisors are assigned to Scholars depending on academic interest.

Funding comes in two forms:

1. Costs the program can eliminate:
 - Code that reduces GRE fee by half
 - Letter that waives application fees at most schools for McNair Scholars
 - Scholarships that cover the cost of school visits and conference travel
 - Membership into professional organizations
 - Subscriptions to academic journals
 - Business Cards
2. Funding for things you do as a McNair Scholar:
 - Submit a completed research work
 - Maintain a research log
 - Complete Teaching Academy
 - Complete GRE prep course
 - 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.
diversity.utexas.edu/academiccenter/mcnairscholars

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

Q: *How are “low income,” “first generation,” and “communities underrepresented in graduate education” defined for the purposes of McNair?*

A: Since it is a federally funded program, McNair Scholars must follow 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 parents have completed a four-year degree in the United States. Students with older siblings who have earned bachelor’s degrees are still considered first generation if neither of their parents have done so.

The federal government considers students belonging to the following groups to be “underrepresented” in graduate education: Black, Hispanic, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, Native American, Pacific Islanders.

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 along with the McNair cohort. We cannot award you funding if you don’t meet the eligibility requirements, but we still want to support you in other ways!

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 to at least be leaning in the direction of a Ph.D.

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 leaning towards graduate school, 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.

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.

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 mentor and advisor 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.

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.