

Recognition Reception: Achievements and Awards

On Friday, April 24, the McNair Scholars Recognition Reception was held at the Lied Center. In addition to celebrating scholar accomplishments, faculty and graduate student mentors were recognized for their support of the program. Over 80 faculty and graduate student mentors, friends, and family members attended the dinner reception.



Heather Flores

Honored guests for the evening were the May 2009 graduates, including: Joshua Alvarez, anthropology; Rebecca Beals, sociology; Acacia Caraballo, chemical engineering; Juan Cangas, psychology; Martin Diaz, electrical engineering; Kyle Jackson, environmental studies; Willie Novotny, biochemistry; Chelsea Rivera, child, youth and family studies; Maegan Stevens-Liska, history; and Mo Wax, business administration. The graduating seniors shared their post-graduation plans, and were awarded a dictionary embossed with their name and McNair Scholars Program. The graduates also received a sky blue honor cord, in memory of Dr. Ronald McNair's flight suit, to wear for the commencement ceremony in May.

The featured speaker for the event was Heather Flores. A recipient of the prestigious IGERT Fellowship and the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, she is a co-author of at least five publications. The research conducted by her lab entitled, *Drosophila Hybrid Incompatibilities*, was recognized as number 7 in Science Magazine's "Top Ten Breakthroughs of the Year in 2006."

Ms. Flores spoke about her McNair experience and how it helped her reach her academic and career goals of obtaining a Ph.D. Dr. Gordon Woodward, Department of Mathematics, initially encouraged her to get involved in research. During the summers of 2002 and 2003, she worked with Dr. Ricardo Cortez at Tulane University. As a UNL McNair Scholar (2003-2005), she conducted research under the guidance of Dr. John Osterman and Dr. Patricia Herman of the School of Biological Sciences. In the Summer of 2004, she participated in the Leadership Alliance program at Cornell University under Dr. Charles Aquadro, with whom she works now as an advanced doctoral student in genetics and development.

Detailing her academic progression, she explained how she went from feeling unprepared as an incoming college freshman, to feeling confident and prepared not only to apply to graduate school, but succeed once she got there. Some of the changes were credited to learning and maturity, but she concluded, "most were due to the help and guidance from McNair and my faculty mentors."

Another highlight of the evening was the presentation of two awards to acknowledge a faculty mentor and a graduate student who've made significant contributions to the McNair Scholars Program and to our scholars.

For his mentoring and support of our scholars and for his commitment to the Program, Dr. Cody Hollist received the 2009 McNair Faculty Appreciation Award. Dr. Hollist has served as a McNair faculty mentor for three years working with Corey Minchow, Chelsea Rivera, and Brittany Sznajder-Murray. As a first-generation college student, Dr. Hollist has a deep understanding of McNair scholars. He knows from his own experience the challenges they face and serves as proof positive that with a lot of hard work and some great mentoring, you can compete with the best. Last fall, Dr. Hollist shared his experiences as a first-generation college student with the incoming scholars and described his journey to becoming a faculty member at UNL. In presenting his award, Dr. Laurie Bellows quoted Sir Isaac Newton, "If our scholars are able to 'see further', it is because they're able to stand on the shoulders of giants, like Cody Hollist."

The Graduate Student Appreciation Award recipient was Tony Kelly II, a doctoral student in physics and a former McNair scholar from California State University-Bakersfield. Tony has served as a panelist at the annual New Scholar Orientation, promoting the benefits of being a McNair Scholar, and speaking about the joys of being a graduate student. He is a talented and engaged graduate student, a promising scholar of high-energy physics, and a recognized outstanding teacher of physics. In 2007, he received his department award for outstanding graduate teaching assistant. Dr. Bellows noted, "Tony represents what the McNair Program is all about."



In Appreciation – Dr. Cody Hollist, Child, Youth and Family Studies (left); and Tony Kelly II, a physics doctoral student (right), received McNair Appreciation Awards for their contributions to the McNair Scholars Program.