



FORT VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY

MCNAIR
SCHOLARS
PROGRAM

P R E S E N T S

THE MCNAIR SUMMER RESEARCH EXPERIENCE 2025





Davida Curtis, Ph.D.

A Message from the Executive Director

Greetings,

It is with great pride and excitement that I reflect on the 2025 McNair Scholars Summer Research Institute. This summer, our scholars demonstrated remarkable dedication, intellectual curiosity, and resilience as they engaged in rigorous research experiences designed to prepare them for graduate study. Each year, our goal is not only to equip scholars with the tools they need to excel academically, but also to support their overall development—and this summer was no exception.

A key highlight of the institute was our inspiring visit to Atlanta, where we participated in the annual SAEOPP McNair/SSS Research Conference. There, our scholars had the opportunity to present their research, connect with fellow scholars from across the nation, and gain invaluable experience in a professional academic setting. The energy, passion, and scholarly engagement on display at the conference were truly empowering, and I am confident our scholars left Atlanta even more motivated to pursue their academic goals.

Throughout the summer, we emphasized a holistic approach to scholar development, recognizing that academic success is deeply connected to physical and mental well-being. Our programming intentionally incorporated wellness practices and community-building activities alongside intensive research preparation. By creating space for reflection, movement, mindfulness, and peer support, we sought to foster an environment where scholars could thrive both personally and academically.

As we look ahead to the academic year, I am deeply encouraged by the progress our scholars have made and inspired by their aspirations. The McNair Scholars Program remains committed to cultivating future leaders and scholars from all backgrounds, and the 2025 Summer Research Institute has reaffirmed the power of this mission.

With appreciation and anticipation,

Davida J. Curtis, PhD

Executive Director, TRIO College Access Programs



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MEET THE SCHOLARS



Scholar: Tarris Bivins

Topic: *Phytoremediation Potential of Paulownia Elongata For Arsenic and Lead*

Mentor: Jacques Surrency, Ph.D.



Scholar: Allanah Hammond

Topic: *Soil Sisters: Collards, Compost, and Chemistry*

Mentor: Jacques Surrency, Ph.D.



Scholar: Adrianna Martin

Topic: *A Crisis Within a Crisis: Depression Among Homeless Young Adults*

Mentor: Maya Rookard-McPherson, Ph.D.



Scholar: Ashanti Noble

Topic: *Form meets Function: Investigating the Role of Classroom Design in Student Engagement and Achievement*

Mentor: Maya Rookard-McPherson, Ph.D.



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MEET THE SCHOLARS



Scholar: Devonte' Payton

Topic: *Environmental Toxicants and Neurogeneration: Investigating PFAS-Induced Effects on DJR-1 Expression in Caenorhabditis Elegans*

Mentor: Celia Dodd, Ph.D.



Scholar: Shikana Porter

Topic: *Filling the Void: The Influence of Male Absence on Young Women's Love Lives*

Mentor: Maya Rookard-McPherson, Ph.D.



Scholar: Kerianna Prescott

Topic: *Is Mental Illness and Violence Linked?*

Mentor: Frederick McLaughlin, Ed.D.



Scholar: JaMaya Reed

Topic: *Unjust by Design: Examination of Racial Disparities in Sentencing Outcomes*

Mentor: Kay Gresham, Ph.D.



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MEET THE SCHOLARS



Scholar: Tatiana Tanksley

Topic: *Public Perception of WIC: Rebranding Strategies to Reduce Stigma and Increase Participation*

Mentor: Josephine Dibie, Ph.D.



Scholar: Arreana Wilson

Topic: *The Lasting Effects of Childhood Trauma: Understanding It's Impact on Adulthood*

Mentor: Roddrick Chatmon, Ph.D.



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Research Highlight



Tatiana Tanksley

Faculty Mentor: Josephine Dibie, Ph.D.

Tatiana Tanksley's research, "***Rebranding WIC: Addressing Stigma to Maximize Participation***," won 2nd place in the Business category during her oral presentation at the 32nd Annual SAEOPP McNair/SSS Research Conference, held in Atlanta, GA, from June 26th–29th. Her project explores how public perception affects participation in government assistance programs and proposes innovative strategies for change. The following is her abstract:

The Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a critical federal assistance program that enhances the health and well-being of low-income mothers, infants, and young children through nutrition education, supplemental foods, and referrals to medical care. Despite its proven benefits, WIC participation has been on the decline—a trend that may be attributed to stigma and negative perceptions surrounding public assistance. This research examines the public image of WIC and investigates how strategic rebranding can reduce stigma and increase engagement. Utilizing surveys, interviews, and comparative case studies, this study analyzes how WIC is perceived by various demographics and presents rebranding recommendations aimed at reshaping the program's image, making it more appealing and accessible to the American public.



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Workshops & Enrichment



During the 2025 McNair Summer Research Institute, scholars participated in a series of enriching workshops designed to prepare them for graduate studies while also supporting their mental well-being. The workshops included: **Conquering the GRE: Your Path to Graduate School, Personal Statement and Scholarly Writing, The Art of Speaking: Present with Confidence, Finding PhD Careers Outside of Academia, and a rejuvenating Homegrown Yoga session.**

Presenters for the summer included Tamara Brown-Payne, Ph.D., Mrs. Seema Dhir, Akeishia J. Patterson, Ed.D., Mr. Barcado Styles, and representatives from Homegrown Yoga. Scholars left the institute equipped with valuable insights and practical tools to guide them as they navigate the graduate school application process and prepare for their academic futures.



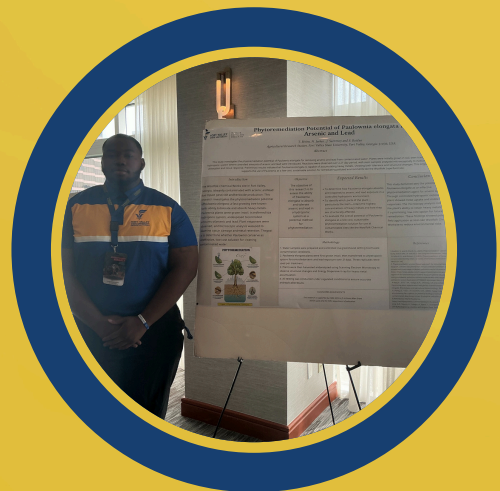
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McNair/SSS Research Conference



During the **2025 Summer Research Institute**, scholars also had the opportunity to attend the 32nd Annual SAEOPP McNair/SSS Scholars Research Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. All ten students proudly presented their research at the conference, gaining valuable experience in scholarly communication. In addition to presenting, they participated in engaging workshops, attended a First-Generation Fireside Chat, explored graduate school options at the graduate school fair, and enjoyed some of the sights and culture the city had to offer. The conference proved to be both enriching and inspiring, and the scholars are looking forward to presenting their research at future conferences.



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Closing Banquet



At the conclusion of the 2025 Summer Research Institute, scholars were honored at a formal Research Banquet held in their recognition. This special event was designed to celebrate the hard work, commitment, and academic growth each student demonstrated throughout the summer. Surrounded by peers, family members, Fort Valley State University faculty and staff, the scholars had the opportunity to showcase their research projects and articulate the significance of their findings.

The banquet served as both a culmination and a launching point—highlighting the scholars' achievements while encouraging them to continue striving toward their graduate school and career goals. Attendees enjoyed an evening of inspiration, reflection, and recognition, complete with student presentations, and award acknowledgments. The event was a powerful reminder of the transformative impact of research and the supportive community behind each scholar's success.



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Benefits of Becoming a McNair Scholar



- **Research** and presentation opportunities
- **Seminars** focused on graduate studies
- **Tutoring** services
- **Academic** counseling
- **Summer** internship programs with stipends
- **Mentoring** and networking chances
- **Support** with graduate school applications
- **Information** and resources on financial and economic literacy
- **Graduate** school visits
- **Cultural** Events



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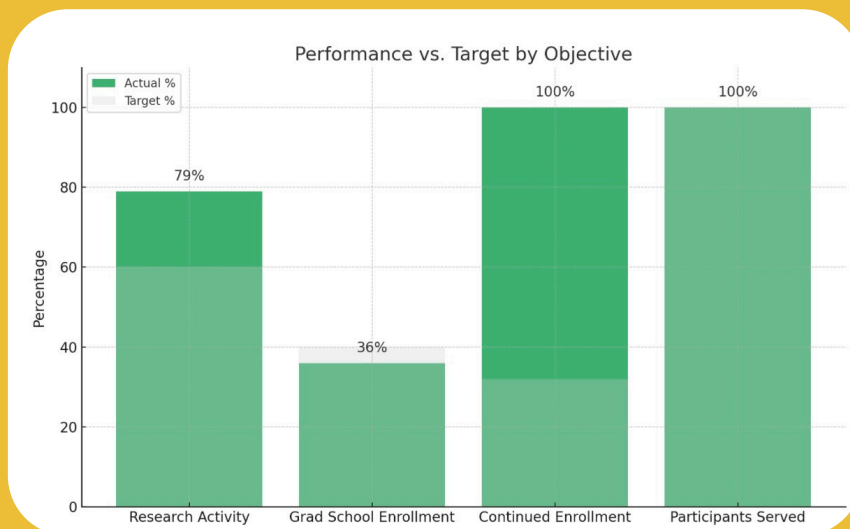
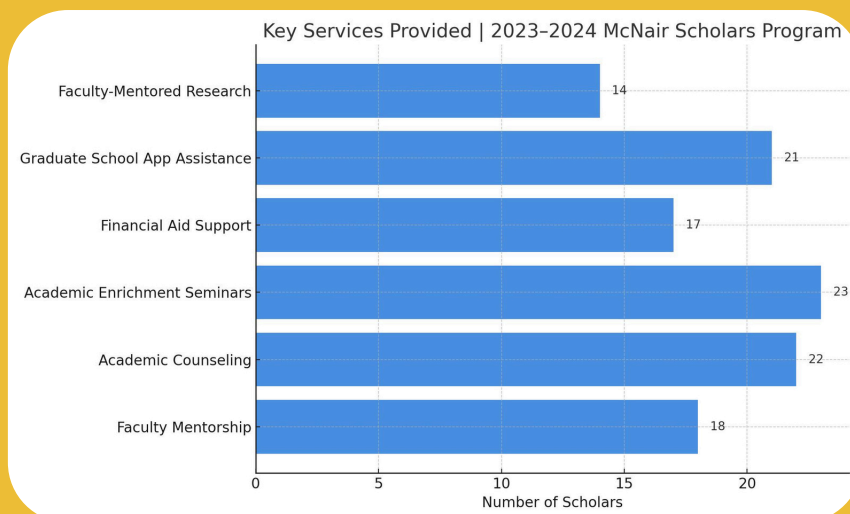
Data Overview



The following data highlights the **impact and accomplishments** of the McNair Scholars Program at Fort Valley State University (FVSU).

The **Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program** at FVSU continues to be a vital pathway for first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students who aspire to pursue doctoral degrees. The program remains deeply committed to promoting equitable access to higher education through faculty-mentored research, academic support, and comprehensive graduate school preparation.

In the 2023–2024 academic year, the McNair Scholars Program demonstrated measurable progress, **surpassing key performance benchmarks and reinforcing the foundation for long-term success**. Through innovative advising strategies, strengthened interdepartmental partnerships, and equity-centered leadership, the program is well-positioned to continue advancing the graduate education pipeline for historically underserved populations.



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McNair Scholars Program Staff



Davida Curtis, Ph.D.

Executive Director, TRIO College Access Programs
curtisd@fvsu.edu



Akeishia J. Patterson, Ed.D.

Associate Director, McNair Scholars Program
akeishia.patterson@fvsu.edu



Ms. Carol Wolfork

Administrative Assistant, TRIO College Access Programs
carol.wolfork@fvsu.edu



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