

Exercise: Understanding the Prompt and Brainstorming

Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program

*"Before you can make a dream come true, you must have one."
--Ronald E. McNair, Ph.D.*



Dr. Ronald Erwin McNair was an African American physicist and astronaut who grew up in a poor Southern community. Despite his circumstances, he was determined to pursue his dream of becoming a scientist. In 1971, he graduated from North Carolina A&T State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics. He subsequently enrolled at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and, at the age of 26, earned his Ph.D. degree in Laser Physics. Dr. McNair soon became a recognized expert in the field. In 1978, NASA selected Dr. McNair for the space shuttle program. He was a mission specialist aboard the ill-fated Challenger flight in 1986.

The Objective: The McNair Program helps CSUN students to pursue graduate studies toward a Ph.D. We provide support mechanisms, including opportunities for students to define educational goals, to engage in research, and to develop the skills to ensure success in Ph.D. area studies.

The Path: Students will earn a stipend and participate in academic-year and summer activities until they graduate. Students will be matched with a faculty mentor who fosters research skills and guidance. McNair Scholars also partner with peers, faculty, and staff to learn new academic skills, expand their scholarly knowledge, and cultivate successful attitudes and values.

The Target Group: Current CSUN Undergraduate Students who have demonstrated their academic achievement and are interested in enrolling in a Ph.D. program with the intent of earning a Ph.D. At California State University, Northridge, the McNair Scholars Program will serve 25 students each year.

Personal Statement Instructions:

The McNair Scholars Program Selection Committee will carefully read your personal statement in order to determine your suitability and potential for participation in the Program. The statement should be about 500 words, carefully written and edited so that the statement reflects your skills and abilities not only in writing but also in thinking through a topic. The personal statement should focus on your academic and career objectives, and address the most interesting and/or stimulating academic experience(s) you have had as an undergraduate. Remember also that academic experiences may be broadly defined, so you may want to think beyond classrooms and learning that has occurred in "school." Describe this experience and explain how this experience helped you grow as a person and how may have helped you understand why getting an advanced degree is essential to your future plans. The personal statement should also discuss your research interests, even if these research experiences are nascent; if you have had any significant research experiences as an undergraduate, you may discuss these experiences in the personal statement. Finally, explain why you feel obtaining a Ph.D. is essential in pursuing goals, and address how the McNair Scholars Program will help you reach your academic goals. Please include your personal statement in the area below.

What are they looking for?	How you can show them that you have it?

Personal Inventory Questions

For this exercise, jot down some notes in response to the following four questions. More questions are included on the next page as a future resource for you. If you can develop some answers to this list of questions, you'll have an "inventory" of material that you can use to craft personal statements in the future.

- How has your undergraduate academic experience prepared you for graduate/professional school?
- What are two or three of the academic accomplishments which have most prepared or influenced you?
- What research have you conducted/scholarship have you developed/presented? What did you learn from it?

- What makes you unique, or at least different from any other applicant?
- What attracts you to your chosen career? Why do you believe it will be/is fulfilling?
- When did you initially become interested in this career? How has this interest developed? When did you become certain that this is what you wanted to do? What solidified your decision?
- What are your intellectual influences? What writers, books, professors, and concepts in college have shaped you?
- How has your undergraduate academic experience prepared you for graduate/professional school?
- What are two or three of the academic accomplishments which have most prepared or influenced you?
- What research have you conducted/scholarship have you developed/presented? What did you learn from it?
- What non-academic experiences contributed to your choice of career (work, volunteer, family)?
- Do you have specific career plans (Specifics of your future career, areas you wish to specialize in/focus on)?
- How much more education are you interested in? Why?
- What's the most important thing the committee should know about you?