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**MAKING THE GRADE: WHAT CONSTITUTES A  
RHETORICAL EDUCATION ... WITH RESPECT TO CLASS  
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presented by

**SUZANNE WEBB**

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
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MAKING THE GRADE: WHAT CONSTITUTES A RHETORICAL EDUCATION  
... WITH RESPECT TO CLASS AND GENDER?

by

Suzanne Webb

A THESIS

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Making the Grade: What Constitutes a Rhetorical Education ... With Respect to Class and Gender?**

By

Suzanne Webb

This study incorporates life history interviews along with empirical research to allow the voices of five McNair scholars to be heard. Rich details of attaining “a rhetorical education” through, around, and despite issues of being classed and gendered individuals ring loud and clear through the two collage essays included in this research (included to bring those voices to the surface). Then, these collage essays are embedded in more traditional research methods– a literature review and a detailed methodology. By combining these three forms of research, this study shows that allowing the personal to surface gives the field of Rhet/Comp a much richer, more detailed picture of what a rhetorical education *is*... with respect to class and gender.

## **DEDICATION**

To my sons Matthew, Michael-Dean, and Markie—

Ya'll are the reason I do all of this.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Dr. William Hart-Davidson and Dr. Leonora Smith  
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# **MAKING THE GRADE: WHAT CONSTITUTES A RHETORICAL EDUCATION ...WITH RESPECT TO CLASS AND GENDER?**

## **FRAMING THE MOMENT: AN INTRODUCTION**

A rhetoric, any rhetoric, ought to be situated within the economic, social, and political conditions of its historical moment, if it is to be understood. A rhetoric is a set of rules that attempts to naturalize an ideology to make one particular arrangement of economic, social, and political conditions appear to be inevitable and ineluctable, inscribed in the very nature of things. To understand a rhetoric, it is thus necessary to examine its position in the play of power in its own time. This means looking at it within its material conditions.

We read and write histories to understand better our differences from the past and this difference provides the point of illumination for the present.

*~ ~James Berlin*



Jumping class in this country is all but impossible (short of winning the lotto or marrying rich); education is the only social capital I have to offer my boys. Perhaps if I can figure my way through the maze of the Ivory Tower, I can then show Matthew, Michael-Dean, and Markie a passageway as well. Perhaps then they won't have to struggle as adults like we did while they were children. It's a selfish goal, but it's *my* goal— to show my boys that education is *the way* to a better life.

## —Charms & Chasms—

July 1999.

I'd been raising 3 kids for 10 years when the youngest finally went off to school full-time. So, I take a job working McDonald's breakfast shift.



I work McDonald's breakfast shift and lunch rush as my 12-year marriage, like a sun-baked cucumber in July, just withers away.



I am 39, and I think I'll go to school.

I just want to take two classes. Just two classes, so I can understand the PC.

The financial aid office at BreadBasket Community College says I qualify.

Recently separated and mother of three (boys; Matthew 9, Michael 7, and Markie 6), I am elated to know the US Government or the State of Kansas (*someone*) (*anyone*) will pay my tuition.

Not only that, I get a textbook voucher. BBCC says to spend the voucher on the books I need at their bookstore and they will send me what's left. Six weeks later, I get a check With tuition paid and books bought, I still have \$200!

*Can I make money going to school?*



I work McDonald's breakfast shift, lunch rush, and every-other weekend (the weekends the boys are with their dad) as I get sick.

*Knife-stabbing pain bursts through my right heel.*

Sweats, chills, and a significant limp. I write McDonalds a letter of resignation.



I enroll in two spring courses. (*We need the money.*) One class is face-to-face, and one online. I opt for the f2f class because it only meets weekly. Not enough strength or stamina to go any more often than that.



I lose all my muscle and all my mojo.

Mornings, I lean, sitting in my bed, for my cane propped up against the headboard, and creep my way down the dark hall to the bathroom.

I wave the boys off to the bus, then crawl back in bed to rest up for my shower.

I dress and lay back down. Just a simple task like getting dressed saps me. The rheumatologist can't see me till May; it's December.

Jamie– the best friend a girl could ever ask for– Jamie, who suffers from chronic Crohn's Disease and IBS and has had all but six inches of her intestine and most of her other insides removed– Jamie with her eternal smile and we-shall-overcome attitude– takes me to KMart to get a heating pad. I have to sit down on the bench just inside the door while she finds and pays for it.

*Sapped again.*

Jamie takes me home; it's noon, and I go to bed till the kids get home.

I manage to throw some nuggets in the oven and warm two cans of green beans in the microwave. Dinner served, I go back to bed. The boys finish eating. I get up, clear the table, lay back down again.

Matthew comes in my room to hand me my blanket from the foot of my bed. I can't reach it.

Christmas night, Jamie comes to sit with me. I am shivering cold. Jamie buries me under five blankets. I can see she is worried about me. I am worried too.

New Year's Eve (Y2K)

The boys and I sit in the living room with a fire in the fireplace. Dinner is hot dogs and marshmallows toasted on sticks. Lying on the floor, I fall asleep before 9:30. Thankfully nobody gets burned.



The doctors say I'm too young for a hip replacement. The doctors say to fuse it instead. A fused hip promises to be pain-free, but with hip fusion surgery, the joint won't ever move again.

New joints are made for old people– the doctors tell me– made to get a 70- or 80-year-old from the couch to the bathroom and back to the couch. They aren't made for 40-year-old

mothers-of-three who do 15 loads of laundry every week. My replacements will need replaced by the time I'm 60. Manmade ones only have a 15- to 20-year lifespan.

A year drifts away. It's March 2001.

The doctors give in and say I can have a new hip— titanium.

Dad comes from Florida to help with the boys while I have the replacement surgery.

Jamie takes me to the hospital. Dad takes the boys to McDonalds.

Even as I wake after my surgery, I sense less pain. I can barely move, have to use a traction-like-rope-thing to adjust myself, but there's no grating bone-on-bone ache.



Doing breakfast, lunch, dinner, and laundry for three boys ain't easy. Taking care of a neglected old house sitting on an acre of hard Kansas clay ain't easy.

A week after surgery Dad has a heart attack.

My walker and I scurry up and down the halls of Wesley Hospital the next three weeks to visit unconscious Dad in the SICU. He's on a ventilator. We don't think he'll make it. Instead of helping with the workload, Dad adds to it.



It's spring of 2002. I'm taking Intro to Business and Shakespeare. I'm enjoying one class and faking my way through the other.

In Intro to Business, to take notes, I grab my left arm with my right hand, lift it up, and lay it in my notebook. Simple gravity is too heavy for me. Being left-handed has become challenging.



I fight with the government to get disability status. Without that— no insurance. Without that— no income. The government denies me on the first go-round, and says I need to go back to graphic design. They say I can handle an 8-5 M-F sit-down job (forget that 2-hour afternoon nap every day just to stay up until 9pm to get the boys off to bed).

I take pills.

One 800-mg Ibuprofen three times a day, two 50-mg Ultram three times a day, eight Methotrexate tablets once a week, Perchocet p.r.n., and a daily Wellbutrin to wash it all away with.



*Wash it all away.*



We (the doctors and I) planned to do my knee next, but my shoulder won't be able to handle the crutches. So, I opt for the shoulder first. Besides, shoulders aren't as debilitating afterward. Good thing too, because Dad, recovered and back in Florida, refuses to come help.



My first two classes at BBCC were Introduction to Multimedia Design and Introduction to Multimedia Production. They helped me orient to the personal computer. I learned Word.

In graphic design (1982-1990), we still used phototypesetting equipment and did the layout by hand—on drafting tables. I couldn't "do" graphic design if my life depended on it. The field has changed. Now it's all about Quark Express, Pagemaker, and Photoshop—softwares I've never even heard of.



*I write to plead my case.*

The government buys in. They realize that retraining is necessary so I can "go back to graphic design."

But, the welfare system isn't geared toward college for retraining. The SRS in Wichita gets quite pissy with me and tells me to take their job placement workshop instead. I politely tell them "*Nofuckingway*." I stay in school.

*School gives me life.*

School helps pay for the kids' lives too. There's a roof over our heads, food in the fridge, the utilities are on (things we couldn't seem to manage when I was married to a printer who made \$20 an hour). Besides, I'm close to earning my Associate's.

I've enjoyed BBCC. It's small, comfortable, familiar. I might keep going there, get their multimedia certification after the AS. But, as I fill out the FAFSA in early 2002, I add Wheat State University to the list of recipients.

BBCC offers me \$10,000 to be a full-time student (Pell grants, student loans). Wheat State offers me \$18,000. The difference is *cash in hand*. I decide to move on, to pursue my Bachelor's.

Even though the size of the WSU campus scares me more than another joint replacement surgery, they are offering me *buy-a-5<sup>th</sup>-grader-a-saxophone* money.



In May, I receive my AS in Computer Science– with a 3.9 gpa.

I go back to BBCC to transfer my transcripts to Wheat State and run into my mentor. She asks me if I'd like to teach at BBCC. I am floored.

*Teach!?!... Me?!... How?!*

She's developed a "Grow Your Own Instructor" program– and I am the one she wants to nourish! She feels I'd make a great teacher. I've never even thought about it. She suggests we meet a couple times over the summer to ground me. She gives me her week-by-week syllabus, the texts she has picked out, and she tells me how to dress. At Butler, teachers are *required* to wear hose.



Fall 2002.

I enroll at Wheat State. I enroll at Wheat State *for the money*. I choose The Nature of Poetry, Motivational Psychology, Intro to Creative Writing, and German 112. I get retro-active credit for 111 with whatever grade I earn in 112; I don't have to sit through 111.

*I don't have to pay for 111.*

In Nature of Poetry, we spend three weeks dissecting Andrew Marvell's one poem "To His Coy Mistress." The next 13 weeks fill with the prof saying *Fuck* three times a class– and blatant sexual harassment. The Nature of Poetry becomes an epic in itself.

Poetry Man nicknames me Chicken-Woman because I knew the word "brood." He attempts to draw Sharon Olds' "Topography" on the chalkboard. His dusty hen-scratches resemble a man on top of a woman. He announces to the whole class that the woman looks like a chicken. Daily, he insinuates that he wants to fuck me; tells me "poets cheat, Sue." I look up how to file sexual harassment against him.



I teach two sections of Introduction to Multimedia Design for BBCC. This pays about \$400 a month. We are struggling, but we are fed and clothed. The ex is paying child support (*for now*).

I go to BBCC to talk to my boss about the adjunct position. She's great. Teaching is going quite well; I love it; the students love me.

I notice a picture of Poetry Man on her wall. I say “how do you know him?” She says, “Oh, he’s my husband.”

She studied under him during her MA.



It’s almost Christmas.

Poetry Man wants to know what we are getting for Christmas. I’m getting a new knee. Chrome.

My right leg juts out at the knee at a 15-degree angle. I should have just enough time to get back on my feet for the spring semester.

I get out of the hospital on December 23.

Doctors want knees immediately weight-bearing. They want it weight-bearing; they want it bending. Physical therapists come to my house each day to force me and the knee to do things we don’t want to do.

My leg is a brilliant purple with shades of yellow, and swollen; it feels like life stabbed a knife into me. But, it holds me up, and it bends a little more each day.



For spring courses, I choose deep-water aerobics. I talk a long time with the instructor who says the water exercise will be good for me and for my knee, hip, and shoulder.

75% of body weight is absorbed in shoulder-deep water. I don’t ache in the pool.

I have to take a sociology course. I take Developmental Psych and Psych Statistics. This is only 10 credit hours. I have to carry 12 hours though to get the full loans and Pell grants (*we need the money*), so I enroll in this boring-as-hell-god-awful 2-credit-hour Career Development course. It’s a filler course chock-full of more footwork than any other class to date.

One day the teacher asks us if any of us are going to grad school. I’ve never even thought about it. My Pell grants run out at the end of my BA. *Grad school isn’t even a possibility.*

She mentions McNair.

The McNair Scholars Program is a prep track for grad school, to help underrepresented students get into PhD programs– most often for students of color, but each year at Wheat

State they have room for a few who are first-generation poor white folk. I want to know more. They are on the WSU campus. She'll arrange for them to visit our class.



Sociology 301, the teacher is a card— he throws chalk, drops his books on the floor, generally cuts up— but tells us about social alienation, social class, and social mobility. And, about motherhood. Being a mother negates almost any possibility of being a force in the workforce.



Some arm part or another slips and the shoulder quits working again.

Sometimes, I can hold my coffee cup to my mouth. *Sometimes not.*



In the Summer of 2003, the letter comes from McNair. I have an interview! I have nothing to wear.

Jamie and I go to the DAV store down on South Seneca. Sometimes we can really score there— if we look long enough.

My lucky day; a size 22, off-white, linen suit for \$6.97.



The McNair office manager shows me to the conference room. I sit across from three distinctive ladies, each with pen and paper in hand and demure looks on their faces. I'm wearing my linen suit and my sterling silver key charm.

People always ask me “what’s that key for?” and I tell them “a three-lock box” or “the key to the city”— cute shit like that.

The ladies take turns asking me a myriad of questions.

*“How do you cope with stress?”*

I have several tactics. I like driving, listening to loud, screaming rock and roll. Any song *that loud* gives me three minutes of forget-where-I-am-solace.

I also like mowing. Riding on that old mower, like loud, screaming rock and roll, drowns out life and all its drama.

And, I like talking to Jamie. In psych, we learned this is called The Talking Cure. We talk about all the stuff in our lives we really can't control, but that tries daily to bring us down. We talk about child support (or lack thereof), needing to get away, getting school supplies for our kids, new ways to fix fish sticks. We laugh it all off as we part ways to fix dinner for our kids.

I tell the ladies about using music, mowing, and my best friend as my foremost forms of stress relief.

The ladies thank me for my time. Then one asks what my key means. I put my thumb and forefinger on the key, smile slightly, give my usual cutesy answers about the 3-lock box and the city and then say, "Today, though, I think it's the key to my future."



Both Michigan State and Wheat State had accepted me into their MA programs for fall '05, but the boys didn't want to leave. So, I didn't see me leaving. Then one crisp October afternoon, my ex pops up and says that *we'd* raised the boys for six years; *I'd* raised the boys for six years; *he'd* take these six years. This meant I could go to MSU. I was ecstatic.

*Would they still have me?*



In December of 2005, I loaded up my old '94 Ford Explorer and headed cross-country through driving rains to Michigan. I'd never even stepped foot in the state. I gambled and rented a campus apartment online.



Doing McNair showed me the path to MSU. I did scholarly research, professional development, networking, and now I'm about to earn my MA in Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing. Last summer, I wrote and submitted my applications to PhD programs. Earning that PhD is my master plan (McNair's too, actually).

If I can get a professorship somewhere, my boys can go to school there. Wherever I teach, they will be able to go half price– or even free. The only way they jump class in this country is to get their education. I think they see that. *God, I hope they see that.*



I moved off campus last October– making room for Matthew and his two cats as Matthew has now been accepted into MSU!

Jamie flew up from Kansas to help me move– thanks to my brother’s frequent-flier miles. She and I talked for two weeks while she ran up and down my stairs, carting my stuff into its new nooks.



Matthew emailed me today. To graduate from high school, he needs a \$200 for his cap and gown. I don’t have it.

I’m looking for a second job.



## **MAKING THE GRADE: WHAT DOES A RHETORICAL EDUCATION LOOK LIKE ...WITH RESPECT TO CLASS AND GENDER?**

We come from outside, knocking on doors and feeling inferior. We don't have friends in these high places— these ivory towers. We don't have monies to afford placement services. We don't have mothers or fathers who graduated college. We don't even know how to dress ourselves— not “professionally” anyway. We don't know academe, and for the most part, it seems, academe doesn't wanna to know us.

That's where the McNair Scholars Program (MSP) came in for me. McNair introduced me to all sorts of academic rules. How to dress. How to talk. How to do. How to be. McNair helped me “invent my university.” Or, perhaps they helped me invent “their” university?— I'm still trying to figure that out.

In my research, I bring a combination of traditional academic empirical research (literature review), personal narrative, and non-fiction prose (collage essay) to the table to discuss the issues of class and gender within the rhetorical education of the McNair Scholars Program. This curiosity began as I entered a Master of Arts program in Rhetoric and Writing and became a Teaching Assistant in First Year Composition. Being a McNair alum, I began to wonder if McNair's curriculum could help all first year writers situate themselves better in Higher Ed, and so I asked my thesis committee: Could a McNair-like curriculum be brought to bear on First Year Writing? They cautioned me, saying I would need to do some preliminary research to find out first if McNair *is* a rhetorical education. So, I posit this thesis as that preliminary research.

## **WHAT CONSTITUTES A RHETORICAL EDUCATION? A LITERATURE REVIEW**

The McNair Scholars Program bears the name of astronaut Ronald E. McNair. Ron McNair, on his second journey into space aboard the Challenger when he met his death, was “born and reared in a small town in rural segregated South Carolina, [and] did not let impoverish beginnings or the color of his skin stand between him and his goal of becoming an astronaut. ... [His] lifelong commitment was to continue his quest to inspire and encourage students to dream big, work hard and accomplish their goals. ...Dr. McNair proclaimed, 'I believe that in our urban and rural cities there are great minds and talents with hands that can control a spacecraft with the same dexterity that they control and handle a basketball. These talents must not be wasted'” (ronaldmcnair.org).

The national McNair Scholars Program was established and named in memory of Ron McNair by Congress in December of 1986 (mtsu.edu/~mcnair). The MSP at WheatState University, where I was a program member, started in 1995. Their purpose is to help underrepresented student populations attain their PhDs. One-third of the McNair Scholars at WheatState University are first-generation, low-income students. That was my ticket in.

The McNair Scholars Program, funded by the US Government, “prepares participants for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities. Participants are from disadvantaged backgrounds and have demonstrated strong academic potential.. . The goal is to increase the attainment of PhD degrees by students from underrepresented segments of society” ([www.ed.gov/programs/triomcnair/](http://www.ed.gov/programs/triomcnair/)).

I went back to college at age 39 with 18 credit hours to my name. Three years later, with an Associates Degree in Computer Science, I enrolled in WheatState U as a Creative



Writing major and found my way into McNair. For me, the MSP provided guidance on how to find funding for graduate school. They talked to me about how to dress. They showed me how to write proposals, abstracts, scholarly research, a statement of purpose, and how to fill out graduate school applications. They even paid the application fees to those graduate programs for me. McNair gave me a working knowledge of these tools and resources so that I could negotiate graduate school. I *think* the McNair Scholars Program gave me a rhetorical education.

So, through this literature review, I seek to answer the following questions: What is a rhetorical education? And, more particularly, what is this rhetorical education with respect to issues of class and gender, since, traditionally, class and gender were not accounted for? Allow me to elaborate... Traditionally, rhetors were white and male and often economically advantaged. Since ancient times, things have, somewhat, changed, but do we (the field) have ways of helping working-class and working-poor students negotiate Higher Ed? Do we (the field) have data on how students negotiate motherhood and graduate school? Is there research available to us regarding students who are lower-class *and* mothers? Once I incorporate literature on what a rhetorical education is with respect to class and gender, I will then seek to find other places where a rhetorical education is happening, though this may be called something else.

I came to this research question through an idea that we (writing instructors) need to give our students a “rhetorically whole education,” and that education would include textual, visual, oral, and ethical components. My thesis committee wanted to know why I felt this way, and how I’d come to the conclusion that being “rhetorically whole” meant presenting myself in these four modes. I had to think critically about this, and in

reflection, I realized that it was, in large part, through my experiences with McNair that I learned to be textual, visual, oral, and ethical as they took me through their program, teaching me the different genres I would write in once in graduate school (abstracts, proposals, cvs), as they had me do mock presentations of my work, as they took me to conference to present that work, as they showed me ways to make effective PowerPoints, and as they treated me with respect and in confidence while I learned what to *do* and how to *be*.

While I do stray from my original research question: “Could a McNair-like curriculum be brought to bear on First Year Writing?,” I must do this research first– to determine if McNair provides “a rhetorical education.”

## **A TRADITIONAL RHETORICAL EDUCATION**

In ancient times, students of rhetoric learned through the Progymnasmata. The Progymnasmata is “[a] set of rudimentary exercises intended to prepare students of rhetoric for the creation and performance of complete practice orations.. . . A crucial component of classical and renaissance rhetorical pedagogy, many Progymnasmata exercises correlate directly with the parts of a classical oration ([rhetoric.byu.edu](http://rhetoric.byu.edu)).

Though I begin my quest for “what is a rhetorical education” with the Progymnasmata, I know that times have changed, and I wanted to familiarize myself with today’s field-based conversation regarding “a rhetorical education.” So, in order to be able to speak to the field and from within the field, I looked to several journals core to the field of Rhetoric and Composition. While I knew there were many books and memoirs available to me, I wanted to produce a practical account of what the field has to say– to others who

are also in the field. To do this, I wanted to look specifically into our peer-reviewed journal articles pertinent to our field. I felt this would give me a theory-grounded starting point. To reign in the search a bit, and limit the size of this study, I decided to search through the last ten years of articles in *College English*, *JAC (Journal of Advanced Composition)*, *College Communication and Composition*, and *Rhetoric Review*. To find these articles, I did a type of “content analysis.” I looked at the titles of articles and read the content of their abstracts for the words rhetoric, composition, class, gender, and motherhood.

I found approximately 50 articles that I thought *might* fit my inquiry. I saved those pdf files into folders on my computer— one folder for each of the four journals. Once I’d searched the last 10 years of all four journals, I proceeded to open these article files and read the entire article for content— still looking for my key terms (rhetoric, education, class, gender, motherhood). Often “class” meant the classroom. “Education” was used in a broader sense than my query required. “Gender” referred to the female-male dynamic. This eliminated many of my finds.

I then read through all fifty articles, purged most of them, and sorted the remaining articles into one folder called “Use These.” Sadly, this folder held a mere eleven articles. But, these eleven articles are the foundation of my literature review. Then, through a citation analysis, I sought to find others being quoted on these same topics. Through this analysis procedure and literature review, I attempt to align these issues. This literature review, based on what I learned through these articles, discusses the existing conversation regarding “what constitutes a rhetorical education with respect to class and gender” currently ongoing in the field of Rhet/Comp. My hope is that this review situates what a rhetorical education “looks like,” according to this specific literature. I take this

methodological approach to my literature review to allow me to enter this conversation with a field-based understanding of who has come before me, what they said, and whether or not their ideas have been implemented. Ultimately, this approach, I hope, will help the field to find new ways to help students “invent their universities.” The patterns I detect in the literature are the patterns I will test for in my data...

Through this method for acquiring existing literature— through the last ten (even fifteen) years of *CCCs*, *College English*, *JAC*, and *Rhetoric Review*— the articles I found are alarmingly few. These gaps in the existing literature, I believe, make my study not only relevant to the field of Rhetoric and Composition, but, quite possibly, essential to it. Further, I admit that this study focuses on four journals in the field and the peer-reviewed articles within them that have made it to print. The confines of this particular study do not allow me to focus on those countless books and memoirs that are available on this subject matter— I merely look to our journal articles. But, herein lies this gap.

## **A PRECEDENT FOR CLASS**

Julie Lindquist’s work in “Class Ethos and the Politics of Inquiry: What the Barroom Can Teach Us about the Classroom” brings the barroom to bear on the classroom. Much like Lindquist brings that barroom to bear on the classroom, I’d like to bring the McNair Scholars Program to bear on the field of Rhetoric and Composition. This way, I believe, we can look at how the McNair program *is* a rhetorical program. Lindquist suggests “that an examination of rhetorical practices at the local bar is instructive for two reasons: (1) the barroom is predictably different from the university writing classroom; and (2) the barroom is surprisingly similar to the university writing

classroom... As institutional spaces where public knowledge is constructed according to private rules and where conventional discourses are routinely— even ritually— performed, [these places] have much in common.” Lindquist explains that in our classrooms “rhetorics— ways of speaking and of knowing— of the middle-class academic community are sanctioned and performed.” While Lindquist draws on the neighborhood bar, I draw from the McNair Scholars Program. Within both of these institutions, is “an economy of discourse, and it is within the terms of that economy that rhetorie— the sum of the discourse-knowledge equation— is produced” (Lindquist 2. 226).

McNair taught me how to write academically, how to dress academically, how to present academically— the terms of the McNair economy. “[McNair taught] not only by describing [and providing] rhetorical strategies,... but also enact[ed] them through relationship with [professional activities such as conference presentations and scholarly research]” (Lindquist 2. 226).

Lindquist has elsewhere discussed that, “To the extent that there has been a general recognition that “class” names a social reality that indexes rhetorical practices and predicaments, it has been, until recently, all but absent in conversations about teaching and learning in composition studies” (Lindquist 1. 189), which may well speak to why it’s been so difficult to find literature for this lit review. But, the tie between Lindquist’s work and the McNair Scholars Program can hardly be argued. “[McNair scholars] are asked to render successful affective performances to create viable personae as middle-class critics and producers of discourse” (Lindquist 1. 197). McNair Scholars are given a set of tools by the McNair Program, which we use in order to “create viable personae” as graduate school

material. Lindquist's work has allowed me to see this connection between a traditional rhetorical education and the McNair Scholars Program.

Similar to Lindquist, David Borkowski, in “Not Too Late to Take the Sanitation Test,” says that “[w]orking-class academic narratives reveal a number of common themes, like dual estrangement and internalized class conflict.. Overall, gender and race relations continue to privilege white, male, working-class kids over females and minorities in their class, while male prodigies have a leg up on their female counterparts” (102).

While Borkowski talks of how “[b]ooks train working-class kids in the cultural practices of the elite, equipping them with information and discourses not circulating in their daily lives,” it was the McNair curriculum that did this for me. Becoming a McNair scholar “provide[d] upward mobility.” But, “[t]his stage of the passage... involves more than a socioeconomic leap” (103). This stage of passage asked undergraduate students to become graduate students (i.e. a professionalization into Higher Ed.). This stage of passage required that we not only know what to do (to gain entry into Higher Ed), but also how to be (once members of Higher Ed). McNair offers a variety of tools and strategies to negotiate most changes as we McNair alums made this jump.

Borkowski and I agree: “Being a child from the working class [should] be worn as a badge of honor rather than be the cause of embarrassment” (106). Yet, “the academy often forces working-class academics to erase crucial parts of who they are. Furthermore, it demonstrates how rejecting class origins or ignoring class differences can profoundly affect teaching (and scholarship), as well as the relationship many working-class academics have with their institutions. Because the subject of class has been ‘academe’s dirty little secret’” (113). While McNair does try to build on these relationships, it also must act quickly,

delivering its messages in a mere year or two, whereas a student's class status has had 19 or 20– or even 39 years– to take hold. McNair seeks to professionalize students, through (up to) two years of lessons on writing, speaking, presenting, and dressing for academe. This way, McNair's “approach questions the built-in elitism of academic mobility” (Borkowski 119) as they encourage and teach students to thrive in graduate education who were not previously privy to the ways of academe.

Linda Brodkey too, talks of class in her work. Brodkey says, “[e]ach institutionalized discourse privileges some people and not others by generating uneven and unequal subject positions as stereotypes and agents.” And while we could then say that McNair tries to even this playing field, McNair doesn't offer all of the tools necessary to negotiate all of the places where the baseline is uneven. What we educators must do is to “interrupt the assumptions of unchanging, irreversible, and asymmetrical social and political relations between the privileged and unprivileged.. ” As Brodkey boldly states, “you don't resist racism by denying that racism exists, but by confronting it in yourself and others, teachers cannot divest themselves of those vestiges of authority that strike them as unproductive by ignoring the institutional arrangements that unequally empower teachers and students” (129). I embrace class differences. I embrace gender differences. I know I can learn from folks who are middle-class. Further, I believe that they can learn from me. Here, then, is a rather large gap in the research available in our field. We don't have much literature on how to negotiate Higher Ed. Since I would like to see more literature on class– and not just working class– available within our field, perhaps, then, this work can add to the literature on class (more broadly speaking) within the field of Rhetoric and Composition.

The interviews I conducted for my study, much like Brodkey's "Literacy Letters" are class-based narratives. In the Literacy Letters, not only is class an issue, but "gender is a crucial dimension of [the writers'] subjectivity" (136) as well. The folks in Brodkey's work had a "shared understanding of mothers' work... [which] once again articulates their mutual identity as gendered subjects." But, this "subjectivity [is] contingent on class" (138) as well, so even after I learned to open the door to the Tower, I still didn't have the know-how to negotiate its hallways. Often "schools not only tolerate but legitimate the very forms of classism, racism, and sexism that American education is publicly charged with eliminating." Some view that "teachers and students relate to one another undistracted by the classism, racism, and sexism that rage outside the classroom" (139). We cannot afford, I believe, to "say no to differences that matter to those students who live on the margins" (140). These differences matter to *me*. These differences *are* me. By becoming a McNair scholar and following their curriculum, we McNair scholars are able to gain entrance into graduate education in order that we can "interrupt the assumptions of unchanging, irreversible, and asymmetrical social and political relations between the privileged and unprivileged" (Brodkey 127). At least, that is my plan.

If "resistance inside educational discourse is then a practice in cooperative articulation on the part of students and teachers who actively seek to construct and understand the differences as well as the similarities between their respective subject positions" (Brodkey 140), I have to wonder how well (if at all) McNair really did this for me. While I was immersed into a pretrack for grad school; we didn't talk much about money (other than where to find funding). We didn't talk about the economic (and thus fundamental) differences I'd meet once I entered Higher Ed. While I was given set after set



of tools to be successful in graduate school, it seems that class-based flatware– forks and knives of negotiating Higher Ed (a middle-class society)– weren't really brought to the table. McNair Scholars are (often) economically-disadvantaged, but if we don't talk about how that disadvantage will rear itself and play out once we're in MA and PhD programs, how will we ever situate ourselves in professorial positions (unless, like some folks have done, we deny our roots, or let our new-found class status wither away our old selves)? So, while the McNair program may be a place we (the field) can look to for guidance, it may also tend to be problematic in some areas.

The director of the program at WheatState University, LaWanda Holt-Fields, says that program reflects on each year's accomplishments and shortcomings, and the directors then decide on changes for the next year. A change Holt-Fields is already considering, based on my interview with her, is to ask former McNair scholars, now that they are *in* graduate school, what McNair could have done differently to make the transition even smoother. This reflective moment and initiative to make changes based on reflection, seems quite rhetorical, at least to me, and I look forward to responding to her query.

## **A SHORT RATIONALE ON GENDER**

This section focuses on questions of gender by looking at Lindal Buchanan's work on Anne Hutchinson. And, while Linda Brodkey's work speaks to *both* class and gender, Lindal Buchanan published on the "maternal rhetor" Anne Hutchinson, in the *Rhetoric Review*. Her article details how "Puritans employed Hutchinson's fertility and malformed offspring to discredit her, silence her supporters, and consolidate secular and religious

power.” Buchanan indicates that “a set of gendered obstacles, opportunities, and persuasive means... arise at the junction of maternity and public discourse” (Buchanan 239).

Buchanan reports that, “[i]n recent years feminist scholars’ ... research indicates that once the discipline’s prototypical male speaker is replaced by a woman, rhetorical opportunities and constraints shift dramatically, especially regarding the body’s significance in public spaces.” Buchanan discusses Mattingly’s observations that the “place of the gendered body has historically been peripheral to the study of rhetoric.” I need to see more on maternal rhetors. I am one. I was raising three boys as I did my undergraduate work. And, I know others— students, mothers, and McNair scholars— who balanced, somehow, all of these lives as they learned how to be once inside Higher Ed. This partitioning of “motherhood” from “gender” became necessary as I conducted my research; each time I asked one of my participants about their lives, they responded that they, too, were mothers and that “motherhood” was unquestionably a key feature of attaining their education. And, thus “motherhood” became my specific focus, since I cannot possibly address the entire field Gender Studies within this Master’s thesis. I can, however, look to motherhood. And, I see this separation as a most productive constraint.

But, sadly, while finding material on class-based rhetorics was a difficult task, finding material on mothering was nearly impossible, and Buchanan’s piece is all that I could find in our journals on maternal studies. I believe there to be much research in Women’s Studies and in books on this subject, but, again, journal articles within our field, are, sadly, few and far between. So, I wonder, can I elicit scholarly works in which we educators talk about our students, since, essentially, I am also still a student? I don’t know...

Meanwhile, In order to attempt to bridge some of the gaps in the existing literature, I will next look at what tools are offered in traditional rhetoric studies and then look at the tools the MSP offers its program members.

## **THE TOOLS OF A RHETORICAL EDUCATION**

Let us think back to the Progymnasmata. According to J. David Fleming, “Progymnasmata are collections of speaking and writing exercises for students of rhetoric [and these exercises] played an extremely important role in European education from Antiquity to the beginnings of the Modern Era.” Fleming believes that what “is most valuable about the Progymnasmata,... a unified pedagogical program in the language arts, shap[es]... rhetorical character; and [is] organized around a sequence of well-defined exercises.” This is what the McNair Scholars Program did for me.

To become a McNair Scholar, and also quoting Fleming, “a student needed, first, nature, that is, native talent (or at least a fervent desire to improve); second, art, that is, a precise but flexible theory of civic discourse that could be learned in formal settings; and, third, practice, that is, a rigorous program of drill and exercise meant to internalize the art and make it part of the student's very ethos.”

As McNair Scholars, we “practiced.” We “learned to write and speak by reading and listening to model texts, using the art of rhetoric to isolate, analyze, and emulate desirable features found therein.” We “[read] text aloud. We did “exercise[s]: the working through by students of a program of well-defined and minutely focused drills and activities, repeated almost ad nauseum and sequenced so that new skills built on already acquired ones”. In McNair, we “further developed [our] discursive habits and dispositions by composing, on

[our] own [and with the help of faculty mentors], full-scale speeches” and original scholarly research. “The Romans called this part of rhetorical training declamatio. [This,] the exercises of the progymnasmata,” help[ed] students make a smooth transition from the ‘play’ of the classroom to the ‘business’ of real-world civic action”— the real world of a graduate education. McNair’s curriculum *was* a Progymnasmata.

“The relevance of the classical program resides, [Fleming] believe[s], not in the actual exercises themselves, but rather a complete and developmentally attuned curriculum in written and spoken discourse, a multicourse program of language instruction whose end product is neither a text nor a skill nor some body of knowledge but a set of deep-seated verbal habits and dispositions oriented to public effectiveness and virtue.” This is what the McNair Scholars Program did for me. They offered me a “set of deep-seated verbal habits and dispositions” that not only oriented me toward graduate studies, these tools (habits and dispositions)— ways of talking, dressing, writing, *being*— have allowed me to thrive as a graduate student. Interestingly, the Greek rhetorical education was highly exclusive, including, traditionally, only white males— McNair, too, is highly exclusive, targeting only lower income, first-generation, and underrepresented student groups.

## **PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THEIR PROFESSIONAL LIVES**

In “How seriously are we taking Professionalization? A Report on Graduate Curricula in Rhetoric and Composition,” Peirce and Enos question whether graduate students are effectively being prepared for professorships. They question if professionalization should be a primary goal in graduate education (204). While Peirce and Enos found that research proposals often appear as required writing, they are also

concerned that “knowing how to write articles for publication may turn out to be more important than knowing how to write proposals for research grants” (208). McNair taught me to write both research proposals and articles for publication— and McNair began this instruction while I was still an undergrad. Peirce and Enos call for us (the field) “to broaden the definition of what we have been calling professionalization” (210). Therefore, I believe, we can look to the McNair Scholars Program in order to broaden our horizons regarding “what we have been calling professionalization” within the field of Rhetoric and Composition, and this is precisely what I hope my research does.

## **ADDING SOCIAL ASPECTS TO A RHETORICAL EDUCATION**

Jennifer Bay has a striking piece in *College English* that could set a precedent for looking at McNair in a rhetorical light. Bay says, “most would agree that English should foster an understanding of how human beings use language aesthetically and rhetorically in ways that matter for culture, civic society, and meaningful human existence.” Granted, Bay is discussing an internship practicum at Purdue University, but there are many similarities to her course at Purdue and the curriculum and social engagement provided by McNair. Right now there is “little agreement on how... internships should be supervised and what guidance should be provided for students.” Bay feels that Rhet/Comp programs need to “attempt to make the English curricula directly relevant to workplace situations” (134). McNair’s curricula is “directly relevant to workplace situations” too— to the workplace of graduate school. And while I don’t feel I formed a network within McNair, I do feel they gave me a set of tools and even social skills that I’ve been able to employ in graduate school.

Bay argues that an internship practicum helps fill the gap between students doing internships as independent work and students doing internships within a support network. Her course at Purdue University is “an actual course that students engaging in internships take together” (135). Bay says that while universities often speak of the value of internships, they “rarely provide the institutional support to actually undertake the endeavor seriously” (135) – McNair too provides this support as we did come together to learn from other students, from the program staff, and from people who had attained their PhDs and had professorships.

Prior to 1991 at Purdue, internships were independent study. The practicum, however, assists students with their social development. In class, students discuss what they actually *do* at their internships– their problems and their successes. They also “spend time in class working on how students want to present themselves professionally and how they can apply [their] experiences in future jobs” (in my case, and in McNair’s, this future “job” is graduate school). At Purdue, the official catalog description is “an applied course in rhetoric.” The Purdue models serves “as a minicourse in workplace ethics and provide[s] support for challenging unethical behaviors on the job.” The Purdue course is a way of “learning how organizations work from within” (138) so that students can figure out “how to operate in the particular discourse community of the organization” (139). By comparison, for this research, that particular discourse community is graduate school.

Bay says that Anne Beaufort defined a discourse community as “a social entity distinguished by a set of ... practices that result from the community’s shared values and goals, the physical conditions for getting writing done, and individual writers’ influence on the community.” The Beaufort article goes on to say that “successful writers learn to

navigate [graduate school] by drawing on subject matter knowledge, genre knowledge, rhetorical knowledge and writing process knowledge (63).” The participants in Beaufort’s study were able to succeed by listening closely to how others communicated, watching others be successful, and scanning their work environments for rhetorical cues (100). Bay’s work suggests that the McNair scholar’s program does not have to endorse a dominant corporate politics, or be a degree-granting program within academe, and can still “actively work to change structures through collaborative learning and reflection” (Bay 139). This correlation is evidenced by Holt-Fields’ choice to add a question to the yearly query of McNair alums asking what additional tools MSP scholars might need to negotiate graduate school.

Just as a “transition from apprentice to expert can be difficult for students, ... an internship course helps to bridge those two subject positions.. Students can start to inhabit the role of [graduate student] while still learning [still an undergrad]. The [Purdue] course helps students gain comfort and confidence in seeing themselves as part of the professional community,” (139) and “the communal nature of the internship course.. allows students to gain confidence from one another” (140). This is what I learned through McNair.

Bay argues that while each program in Higher Ed will need to develop their own internship practicum, educators will also need to follow through with a great deal of theorizing and research on experiential learning. Bay also feels internship courses will “enhance the understanding of culture, language, and humanity that students gain” (140). I would argue that the McNair Scholars Program gives their scholars a practicum that meets the needs of the MSP scholars– and puts us on a track for professional success in graduate

school. I would argue that we (the field) can look to both Bay's intern practicum together with the MSP for models as to how to provide this experiential learning to our students.

## **A NOT-SO-TRADITIONAL RHETORICAL EDUCATION**

I wanted to look not only at folks saying "Rhetorical Education" by name, but also in other places— places where a rhetorical education is happening, but might be called something else. That said, while the McNair curriculum does not specifically copy the progymnasmata exercises, it does, nevertheless, provide— much like traditional rhetorical education does— "a set of rudimentary exercises intended to prepare students" (rhetoric.byu.edu) for acculturation into higher education. That set of tools we collect through those MSP exercises (those lessons in writing, speaking, presenting, *being*), helps us to negotiate academe. In a later section of this project, as I interview other McNair Scholars and McNair program staff, I attempt to either clarify or complicate this perception.

## **THE NEXT STEP: RESEARCHING THE McNAIR PROGRAM**

Lisa S. Mastrangelo's 2005 archival research on the University of Michigan's Progressive Era (1980 to 1920) graduate program explored female graduate students in rhetoric. Mastrangelo's article tells us stories "stories that may move us to actions but that in themselves cannot guide our actions according to any system," and that's why I chose to highlight her article as well. The snippets of conversation I will incorporate into my research will also "tell us stories"— stories of current women scholars— stories of, perhaps, a rhetorical education with respect to class and gender. I plan to include the voices of the



women I interview, through their own narrative, as their stories are just as pertinent to this research as my own.

I believe some of my next readings will include folks like Lave and Wenger in *Situated Learning*, Anne Ruggles Gere in “Writing Groups,” Julie Lindquist in *A Place to Stand*, Wendy Latrell in *School-smart and Mother-wise*, and *Reclaiming Class*, edited by Vivyan Adail and Sandra Dahlberg. But, this lists books, not journal articles, and therefore they don’t fall within the scope of this particular project; I could be writing a whole dissertation on this subject– perhaps I will– in the not-so-distant future.

Meanwhile, for this thesis, finding existing scholarship in our journals on a rhetorical education with respect to class and gender has been problematic. Perhaps my work can add something to existing scholarship. I also believe work on class and gender may be more plentiful in Sociology. Possibly, as I continue my research in Rhetoric and Composition, I’ll not only be able to draw on my experience with the McNair Scholars Program, and by listening to the voices of other McNair alumnae, I can, perhaps, also reach across disciplines to look for more ways to embrace our critical differences (class and gender differences).

It is my belief that the curriculum that the McNair Scholars Program employs *is* a rhetorical education that considers factors of not only traditional rhetoric, but also allows for gender and class issues– and could even be a foundational curriculum for helping thousands. And, while this particular research project was not able to discern if McNair-like tutelage could be successful in First Year Writing, I still would like to see further research and pilot courses to test my theory. Because, maybe, a curriculum like McNair’s

could, quite literally, help thousands of students each semester to “invent *their* universities.”

## **A METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCH**

*"The personal cannot be ignored, even if it can be denied."  
--Victor Villanueva*

### **RATIONALE**

I believe that the education received through the McNair Scholars Program is a rhetorical education and that their curriculum could prove invaluable in the (first year writing) classroom. McNair— a prep track for graduate school— believes in professionalization. McNair provides classes, lessons, and training, in academic writing (genres of cv, personal statement, abstract, executive summary, and scholarly research). McNair provides discussion about finding funding, how to dress, and how to present (your work and yourself). McNair immerses its scholars into a rigorous program which includes presenting at local and national conferences as well. McNair teaches undergraduates how to *do* graduate school by immersing us in that culture. Their scholarship is echoed in the literature review. Further, Jennifer Bay, David Fleming, Julie Lindquist, David Borkowski all talk within our field about the types of curriculum McNair employs.

This research brings together personal narrative, the non-fiction genre of the collage essay (Elbow, Root), and more traditional academic research vis-a-vis the literature review to discuss issues of class and gender within the rhetorical education of the McNair Scholars Program. For my methodology, I align my findings with the work by David Fleming on the Progymnasmata, and the work I reviewed by Jennifer Bay. And, I draw heavily on inspiration from The Symposium Collective as I interlace concepts of the personal brought to light by Victor Villanueva, Anne Herrington, and Gesa Kirsch. I also

draw lightly on research by Shosanna Pollack. Pollack used “life history interviews” in her 2003 work with incarcerated women in “Focus-Group Methodology...” I feel my interviews are “McNair-life history.” My data collection and data reporting brings actual voices—actual lives—to bear on this research, whereas other forms of data collection (survey, for example) does not allow for this.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **What a rhetorical education *does* and *is*...**

The theoretical threading here is that the outcome of a rhetorical education is a certain shaped person/product. And yet, this rhetorical education does not necessarily have to come from inside the walls of academe (see Lindquist). I look in-depth into the McNair-lives of my participants to see if they (we) received a rhetorical education through McNair.

The literature review portion of my thesis looks to define “what is a rhetorical education—particularly with respect to class and gender.” Using the published, peer-reviewed work within the field, I analyzed journal articles titles and abstracts in four field-related journals (*Rhetoric Review*, *CCCs*, *JAC*, and *College English*) to find instances of (to find the specific words) “rhetoric,” “class,” and “gender.” The research data I collected also looks to this. I have already argued that McNair *is* a rhetorical education. In this methodology, I will analyze the data collected during interviews of four former McNair Scholars, and current McNair staff members to find these instances of “a rhetorical education.”

### **What is an “instance of rhetorical education?”**

I coded for “a rhetorical education” based on the journal articles of David J. Fleming and Jennifer Bay. Both Fleming and Bay discussed forms of a rhetorical education in their articles. Fleming concentrated on the Progymnasmata– repetition and (re)exposure– “a set of deep-seated verbal habits and dispositions oriented to public effectiveness and virtue” (Fleming. 114). Bay recounted a class on “applied rhetorics” at Purdue. Her class, while geared toward internships, practiced social aspects and reflection– both rhetorical situations and both accounted for in the McNair curriculum, and I will operationalize this scheme in my results and synthesis section beginning on page 52.

### **Theoretically Sound**

Through the literature review, I highlighted instances of “what a rhetorical education *is*,” and through my own research I sought to find those instances happening in the lives of these McNair Scholars. And so, with the literature in the field as a solid theoretical backing, I seek to expand on the literature in the field with my project. I, like the Symposium Collective, attempt to “generate a multivocal conversation in a written form, a sort of roundtable discussion that could engage a broader audience than the kind one might expect” (41). In this research, I present my “roundtable discussion” by way of a second collage essay. I used this format 1) because my prologue to this research is a collage all about me, 2) because the collage leaves my participants’ voices alone and untainted, and 3) because I want my audience to be not only the field of Rhetoric and Composition, but also underrepresented undergraduates who may have a chance of gaining entry into graduate school through programs such as McNair.

I have included “elements of autobiography, not as confession and errant self-indulgence, not as the measure on which to assess theory, not as a replacement for rigor, but as a way of knowing our predispositions to see things certain ways, of understanding what it is that guides our intuitions in certain ways” (Symposium Collective. Victor Villanueva. 51). I believe these elements of autobiography allow us to hear, feel, and see into the lives of these McNair Scholars.

### **Pragmatically Sound**

Conducting “McNair-life” Interviews (Pollack) introduces us to the participants in a pragmatically-sound way. Analysis of a larger pool of participants would not help provide the same insight that my in-depth reporting of these five McNair voices is able to do. This is an analysis of the personal. Real people. Real voices. Real life. I want the field to hear– to feel– the struggles that many McNair scholars encounter. I refuse to ignore the personal (Villanueva); I suppose the field will decide whether we can deny it.

### **Accessing Participants**

It’s an interesting story of how I found my participants. In August of 2007, I had just decided to look at the McNair Scholars program *as* a rhetorical education. I mean, I wanted to see if their curriculum was rhetorically situated. One day, as I walked over to a professional development meeting in Bessey Hall, I passed the TRIO/McNair office at Michigan State University. There on the wall display was a brochure. I grabbed it. I went on down the hall to 214 and sat down at a computer. As other students filtered in for this meeting on social networking, Violet walked in. Violet is an MA student. She saw the brochure laying there beside me and she said, “Oh, hey, I was a McNair Scholar.”

Participant One. Found.

One day Dr. Free said to me: “What’s your Masters Thesis on?” I said, “The Rhetoric of Entering Graduate School through the McNair Scholars Program.” She said, “Oh, hey, I was a McNair Scholar.” Participant Two. Found.

*Oh, hey, I too was a McNair Scholar.* Participant Three.

I also wanted to know the intricacies of *my* McNair Scholars Program since I’ve had such resounding success as a master’s student. I knew my program director, and Sugar, my program counselor, could tell me the particulars of my McNair Program. As it turned out, Sugar was a McNair Scholar before she became a program counselor. Bam. Participant Four.

I hadn’t actually progressed far enough with my project to have planned out how I was going to access participants. I knew I could ask my McNair program for a list of possible participants. I knew there was a MSP on the campus of Michigan State and I could ask them for suggestions. I knew that there was a MSP group on Facebook. I was considering all of these ways to operationalize my study. That’s when my participants began to find me. They, quite literally, came to me. I most certainly used a convenience sample.

There is another interesting note about my participants. There are certain attributes the former McNair Scholars share. Two of the Five Voices have earned their PhDs. One is entering a PhD program (fall 2008). One has attained her MA. One is working on her Masters degree. Three of the folks interviewed are or were in Rhetoric and Composition programs.

## **METHODS**

I employed a “mixed methods” approach to this research, incorporating empirical research, interviews, transcription, and a combination of two collage essays (using creative non-fiction *as* a method). I drew my data from the interviews and then asked my participants for their review of the way I represented them in this research.

### **Empirical Research**

The Literature Review (pages 12-28)

### **Interviews**

I conducted in-depth interviews lasting from 30 minutes to 1:38. Using interview methods meant a retrospective account, which works well for this study. But, what might I need to adjust for in using this retrospective account? It is possible that McNair may have already implemented change to the ways these participants experienced their program. And, of course it's possible my participants have forgotten certain aspects of their McNair education. Still, this retrospective account allows us to see— with profound detail— into the McNair-lives of my participants.

I present this research by way of collage essay (a variation on traditional reporting style). Perhaps, my methods are new methods. I want the actual voices of my participants; I do not want statistics, numbers— those are everywhere. I want voices, actual accounts, of folks dealing with issues of class and gender, and I want to see whether these participants feel they received a rhetorical education. I explicate this method in the upcoming “Using Creative Non-Fiction & Collage Essay *as* Research Method” section.

I felt that my participants would best be able to reflect on their time in McNair through an interview. While a couple of us were only a year or two out of McNair, a



couple participants were closer to ten years out of McNair. An interview situation allowed them time to remember. And, while I did produce and use an interview script to conduct my interviews, I used it loosely. That is, I did follow the same script on each of my interviews, and I made sure to cover each of the topics in the script, I let the participants guide the conversation more than I insisted on letting the script guide us. I told them I wanted the interview to be “conversational.” If we “sidetracked,” I felt that, too, would net usable information. I felt that this conversation-style interview would make them more comfortable talking with me about issues of poverty and being mothers, and it turns out they were able to open up and discuss these most personal things with me.

I conducted one interview in a restaurant, over lunch (that’s the one that lasted almost two hours); I conducted one at the home of my participant; the other two, I conducted by phone. My role? Participant/observer – I *am* one of the interviewees. Though I interweave my voice as little as possible in the “Five Voices: Talkin’ McNair” section and let the others talk, my words, thoughts, and participation– my life– *are* the prologue (Charms & Chasms). But, for my part in the Five Voices essay, I asked a friend to interview me. That is, I had her take my script and follow it as we talked through my McNair career. This allowed my interview transcript to follow the same format and provide the same basic content as my other participants’ had done.

The literature review is the field of Rhetoric and Composition talking, and “Five Voices: Talkin’ McNair” are my participants talking. Then, in the analysis section of this thesis, I will weave all of these “stories” together.

## Transcription

The interview times ran from 30 minutes to 1:38. I began transcribing the longest one first, but grew weary of the process when I reached 15 pages of transcript and was only 49 minutes into the recording. I had to change my tactics. I then transcribed only the parts of the interviews that

- 1) Were not me talking (I talked *way* too much as an interviewer), and
- 2) Were directly related to the research question (as former McNair scholars, we tended to share some stories that were not on-task).

This technique of whittling down of the interview still leaves their voices– in tact and unchanged– just excerpted. I also retained the full-length audio files.

While I didn't alter, change, or add to the participants' words, I did make many rhetorical decisions as to which excerpts to include, and how to arrange them. I will discuss this process in depth through out the following paragraphs, and I conclude the "Creative Non-Fiction and Collage Essay *as* Research Method" section with a methodical explanation of my rhetorical decisions and moves (see page 43).

After writing the participants' narratives, I shared the narrative (Five Voices: Talkin' McNair) with the interviewees, along with the written transcripts, and the audio files of their interview. I asked interviewees for their input. Whether they have changes or omissions, I hope to honor their wishes as it is their voices, their stories, I wish to tell. It is, afterall, their voices and stories I want the field to hear. I believe that by having the interviewees double-check my representations of them, I will provide a "workable account" (Sullivan) of their views of the McNair Scholars Program.

## Creative Non-Fiction & the Collage Essay as Research Method

Because my story (Charms & Chasms) is, in large part, my life leading up to being a McNair scholar, my thesis committee agreed that it could preface my thesis research. Once I included my own voice through that genre, I felt it only natural to present my participants' voices the same way. Using a collage essays to present the stories offers consistency for the readers, plus this genre allows my participants voices to just *be*. They do not need me to interpret for them; they do not need me to interject. Both collage essays bring the personal to the forefront. This creative writing approach, allows, by its very nature, an insight that traditional research methods don't permit. This insight is the ability for a reader to connect with a character— when a creative writer reaches their audience this way— their story is often deemed a success. This is what I hope my data presentation accomplishes; it allows the reader to *know* the characters— the participants. This is why my method— using the collage essay approach— is so critical to this research project.

In Peter Elbow's "Collage: Your Cheatin' Art," Elbow discusses how the collage presents readers with "naked fragments [that] suggest blessedly that everything is not so simple." Elbow says that the blips, or crots (the paragraphs), in a collage "rub up against each other without connective tissue. There is more energy in unconnected sentences, more drama." Elbow goes on to say that a "collage, it doesn't try to say anything: it just presents material." Collages ask readers to "experience the material and make up their own mind." I felt that presenting my data as collage (Charms & Chasms; Five Voices: Talkin' McNair) could allow my readers to *experience* the material. Robert Root's 2001 CCCCs presentation "This is What the Spaces Say" adds theory to my method:

The spaces in a segmented essay [or collage] are like the blackouts between scenes in a motion picture, like the fade-out/fade-in, the imageless transition between

disparate sequences of images, the slow dissolve that introduces a flashback, the crosscutting to parallel events. The spaces in a segmented essay are like the silences between songs on a recording, the use of emptiness in photographs to highlight or foreground images, the time lapse between two hyperlinks on a website, the time it takes to shift focus from one facet of a multi-faceted object to another, the breaks between poems in a sonnet sequence. We learn what we learn, we know what we know, we experience what we live in segments and sections, fragments, moments, movements, periods, disjunctions and juxtapositions. This is what the spaces say.  
~ ~Robert Root

Root also offers a way to read collage. Through my (rhetorical) arrangement of the panels in the collages, readers see my intended relationships “in the juxtapositions rather than in a unified unbroken whole.” Root (and I) suggest(s) that readers linger on the section that just ended before they listen to the next one.

In the “Five Voices: Talkin’ McNair” essay, I excerpted narrative chunks from each of the interviews. I did not make changes to their words, nor did I need to interject my comments. The words of the interviewees speak to “what is a rhetorical education with respect to class and gender,” so I let their words do this work, for their words are their lives. I present the narratives “chunks” as a second collage essay for a number of reasons: 1) this form further protects my participants’ anonymity, 2) there is minimal interpretation by me, and 3) they said it so *well*.

### **Procedures**

In order to present my data in a scholarly-yet-creative format, I had to make some design decisions. Once I transcribed the interviews, I began to code my data. To do this, I printed out copies of the transcripts and hand-coded with a highlighter. I was looking for instances of “rhetorical education,” “class,” and “gender”— or, more specifically, “motherhood,” as these “ways of being” are embodied in the lives of these McNair

Scholars. The unit of analysis for this research is a concept; there are three major concepts. Then, for each of the three concepts, I coded for several indicators, or keywords:

1. "A Rhetorical Education" has indicators of doing, being, exposure, imitation, repetition, speaking, writing, presenting.
2. "Class" has indicators of class, money, lack of money
3. "Gender" has indicators of kids, and children.

Besides coding for these indicators, I also I knew I wanted to try and present my data creatively. Most often, the creative writer presents a story void the details of process: cutting, pasting, deciding, and reworking are invisible— only the finished product, or story, remains. Still, I knew I wanted to present my data creatively (and compellingly) as I felt I'd done with my own reflective essay, "Charms & Chasms." In contrast to the creative writer, the researcher produces detailed accounts of their every move— making their audience keenly aware of both processes and procedures. And, in this research— my research— I wanted to be both creative writer *and* researcher.

As a researcher, I began by coding for my indicators. This produced "chunks" of data that correlated to my indicators. Following is an example of this. This is the raw data from one of the transcripts. I saw immediately that it discussed age, motherhood, and McNair. I coded for gender (or motherhood) as denoted with the underline:



I started my undergrad. I'd been out of school for 13 years. I had two children, a boy and a girl, 8 and 13. My undergrad experience was fun. My children would get off the bus at the university and we'd study there. A woman in one of my math classes was a McNair scholar [that's how I learned about McNair]. I started working in the office as a work study as a sophomore. The year before I graduated, I applied for it and became a McNair scholar. I was there for one summer. It had to be 96-97. My mentor was a McNair Scholar. I knew that I could get her [my mentor] to

mentor me. The director [of McNair] liked people to come in with a mentor in mind.



So I coded this passage as showing indicators for gender (children). And, while I do have the entire data set (included in the appendix), I felt that balance too is important in my work, so I wanted to present “Five Voices: Talkin’ McNair” in similar length to the “Charms & Chasms” essay I began this thesis with. These two essays balance both with and against one another (a bit of a juxtaposition there as well). Plus, even after deciding which sections to include and which to omit, I feel that “Five Voices: Talkin’ McNair” is still representative of the whole data set: the crots in this essay express the concepts “what is a rhetorical education, with respect to class and gender” as described by my participants.

After I had chunked my information according to my indicators, I next copied and pasted these chunks into a Word document in the order they came from the transcripts. But, I wanted to juxtaposition my data in a collage essay so that readers could listen both to and between the voices and the stories as Root suggests. I could see that one segment made a compelling introduction to this section, so I decided to frame Five Voices: Talkin’ McNair with the quote “McNair changes lives..”

As a creative writer, through my rhetorical arrangement of the panels in the collages, readers see my intended relationships “in the juxtapositions rather than in a unified unbroken whole” (Root) as I attempt to make one crot talk to the next, while as I also “mix up” the speakers so that their anonymity remains. In one crot, we hear a person say they never even conceived of going to graduate school; and in another someone from the McNair program talks of how graduate school *is* possible. In another crot, the participant discusses a dire lack of monies during their undergrad work— along with the

complexities of having a baby. And in a forth crot, we hear how my McNair program counselor helps students see a path to making things better– even when they are about to have their electricity turned off. This juxtapositioning in the collage gives readers abrupt moments and naked truths in the lives of these McNair scholars. And, the spaces in between the crots allow readers their own moment to digest those lived realities.

This specific arrangement moves the reader from the idea that “McNair changes families” through some of the problems encountered by McNair Scholars and their families. Then it introduces the reader to some of the help (tools, tactics, strategies) the McNair program was able to provide its scholars, and it ends with why McNair Program staff do what they do. This specific arrangement of the data, then, has a beginning, a middle, and an end– like a short story would, and thus should appeal to the logos of the audience. This specific arrangement of data permits the audience to hear and even feel financial hardships McNair scholars often contend with, and thus appeals to the pathos of the audience. And, the data– mine and my participants lived experiences– is an appeal to ethos. This is why I chunked and arranged the data the way I did.

### **Participant Review**

After crafting the collage essay “Five Voices: Talkin’ McNair,” I returned the essay and the original audio transcripts to my interviewees for their input. This step of the process came as “Five Voices: Talkin’ McNair” moved from being a “draft” to being a presentable, sharable piece of research. I also sent a complete draft of the thesis to my participants as I may have inadvertently mis-represented something as I synthesized and reflected. I asked for their input through both stages of this research to make certain I do represent them accurately.

## Triangulation

In this document, I attempted to mesh my literature review to the stories of McNair alum, and I looked deeply into the particulars of one certain program— WheatState University. Then, I paralleled my data with the (very) idea of a Progymnasmata (Fleming) using the Symposium Collective to bring the personal to bear on the field of Rhetoric and Composition. I believe, through taking these particular steps in my research, I found a way to put forward that McNair is giving their scholars a rhetorical education. I see this in my participants' narrative accounts as they discuss features of a rhetorical education, which Fleming described as “a unified pedagogical program in the language arts, shap[es]... rhetorical character; and [is] organized around a sequence of well-defined exercises.” I hear it when one Voice (not so jokingly) says, “it felt like we were in... a bootcamp.” I hear it when another Voice says, “it might start off as duplicating or repeating what you see and eventually you do grow into your own and you take those things you’ve been shown and you apply them to you and you make them a part of who you are.” These are examples of a rhetorical education in action.

I also believe that “[i]f we are going to be interpreting others' lives, we need to be public about how we understand *we* are implicated in the telling” (Herrington). I believe I have managed to bring my own role to bear on this research— as observer, as reporter, and as participant. Additionally, through this triangulation of my data, I think I allow for the field “to bring ‘the personal’ into our thinking in conscious and critical ways and then decide... how to include it in our public writing” (Symposium. Anne Herrington. 49).



## COMPLICATIONS

I do not expect these Five Voices to be representative of everyone who has been a McNair Scholar. Instead, I expect these Five Voices to be real folks. People. These voices have been through issues of class, dealt with motherhood, been promising scholars, done McNair— and we need to start here. I envision a massive research project (perhaps a dissertation) that could survey McNair Scholars across the country. But, in a survey, I'd lose the voice of the participant. I'd just have numbers, statistics. For this study, I wanted people; I wanted *folks*. These Voices are more authentic and even perhaps more ethical and provocative than statistics because in these excerpts we not hear their issues. More importantly, we *feel* them. We begin to *know* them. I could report that “many McNair Scholars are from low-income homes,” and that would be true. But, if my participant says, “I had no money, and I could not buy any diapers,” we *feel* their dilemma. We *care*. And, those spaces (Root) in the collage essay serve to heighten our awareness of that (those) dilemma(s).

There are also two other directions for immediate research I've not followed up on. These are issues of race and age. I certainly do not mean to hide or circumvent race, or age, but due to the confines of this research, I chose not to expand upon these two significant topics. And while both need to be addressed in follow-up research, they are both outside of the scope of this particular project.

As I compiled my data and sorted the interview materials, I noticed a new, yet related, thread. Though there is not room in this study for an in-depth account, this thread is still noteworthy. This thread is the ability of McNair Scholars to be “an agent of change,” and it warrants further investigation. Since initiating change is often rhetorical, I

highlight the moments where “agent of change” is alluded to. I hope to follow this thread in subsequent research. And, as I began to think about change agents, I wondered if McNair sought to change us. So, I asked my participants just that: Did McNair seek to change us? At first I thought this concept of being an agent of change alluded to McNair Scholars being able to infiltrate from within– to bring in our class status, and our gender issues (motherhood), and work with and through these same issues inside our own classrooms– thus helping our students negotiate Higher Ed (and, perhaps, experience new ways of thinking about culture). But, one participant said that she felt McNair changed her identity. I wonder now if she meant that McNair changed her identity by telling her what to *do* and how to *be*? And, is this, perhaps, not such a good thing? So, I also included cros that discuss this change in identity, which actually further complicate my study:



Well, they called it a retreat. It was really nice. We went to a golf and ski resort. But, none of us could golf. None of us could ski. So we were sort of like thinking... why did they pick golfing and skiing? But I think to a certain extent it was to show us how a different culture. That's my context.<sup>1</sup>



It is true that my McNair told us how to dress. In my McNair, they had a visiting professor who told us to buy business skirts from Van Maur (way too expensive for me). She told us to “watch the cut.” ... To make sure they were below the knee. And, to watch the cut of our tops. Now, I do not believe that my identity changes by changing my style of dress, but if I begin to change my style of dress, do I begin to see myself differently? Do others see me differently? These questions are still left unanswered, and their answers may prove to be even more complications to whether McNair creates agents of change or if McNair changes its participants.

## **FIVE VOICES: TALKIN' McNAIR**

The next eight-page section is my data, which I present in the form of a second collage essay. I excerpted this information from the interviews with my participants, and I've chosen to present it here in my participant's actual words. This section *is* their voices. This formatting choice also mirrors my own history of "a rhetorical education, with respect to class and gender," as presented in the first collage essay, Charms & Chasms. The decision to present the data in this particular format allows the words and feelings of my participants to shine through without interjection by me. And while my sampling and arrangement strategies are certainly part of my rhetorical processes, I believe I selected and arranged these Voices so that *their* particular ideas of *their* time with McNair and of *their* lives are well represented in *their* section. The decision to excerpt only part of the original interview transcripts here was made due to the vast amount of material I collected coupled with the belief that the following crots (paragraphs) are representative of the data as a whole— that is, this collage essay covers the concepts of "what is a rhetorical education, with respect to class and gender" as told (and more importantly *as lived*) by my participants.

Each dingbat (the symbol between the crots) denotes a change in speaker, and the speaker's anonymity is further protected when presented in this form. My few interjections appear, in their own crots, in italics, or are marked with the standard [brackets].

## —Five Voices: Talkin' McNair—

What do we do?

We change families.

Because, I can't help you without affecting your boys. Probably not without even affecting your ex-husband. Your siblings. When I help you, and you are successful at reaching your goals, you affect all those people around you. Because you become a change agent.<sup>2</sup>



*She was folks.* She was real people. I was like wow she's got a PhD. And there were these professors that were *way* out there. They were like creatures that farted pink clouds. My thinking was that you had to be super-super smart. And it was something you were born with to be a professor. And when I met Michele, it was like wow. She said you know you can go to grad school; you have the intellect; you're really smart. I wasn't really thinking about all that. She took me to Florida with her [to do the research] and it was just *so much fun*. I was like, *Wow*, this is what you can do with a PhD as a professor?<sup>3</sup>



Honestly, I wasn't thinking about going to grad school. I was hanging out at McNair because they gave you that \$1500. I didn't think I could get in grad school and I figured it can't hurt, and it was summer and I needed some money.<sup>4</sup>



That's the whole point is ... you can [go to grad school]. You can. Even though nobody's told you you can, you can. And, this is how we're going to do it.<sup>5</sup>



I know when our students get in personal jams, financial jams and things I try to be an additional resource to them to help them work their way through it so they can feel comfortable coming to me "my lights are getting ready to cut off" and I can say "ok this is what we need to do" ... but that's just me my nature just to help.<sup>6</sup>



[McNair is] giving people who can't afford to do what the privileged are doing [a chance], especially with that test. Because Kaplan's been around for years and privileged people are sending their kids to Kaplan and paying 3-400 dollars so they can get good scores and get into the good schools. And people who are not privileged, who don't have the socio-

economic capabilities, they're not getting into the programs. So you have McNair who comes in and teaches us the same thing....We got to take it for free.<sup>7</sup>



*I hadn't even thought about graduate school. Pell grants run out at the end of the bachelor's degree.*

*My Life outside of academe 2002-05?*

*Lot of health problems. Arthritis. Joints needing replaced.*

*I had 3 children I was raising by myself. They were 12, 10, and 9 when I stated my BA*

*My class status at that time?*

*On welfare. Getting food stamps.*

*Nuthin' but poor.<sup>8</sup>*



That's the thing. I know a lot of times in my sort of reflection upon McNair a lot of the stuff we did was about appearances and public speaking. We went on a retreat to Shady Creek. One of the workshops was dedicated to public speaking. And they actually had us do improv where we had to like make up a speech in like 10 minutes then we had to go up in front of our peers.<sup>9</sup>



Well I wanted to teach. And, I didn't want to teach high school students. Like I wanted to do research and I wanted to publish.... And I saw getting my PhD as the avenue for publications.<sup>10</sup>



Well, they called it a retreat. It was really nice. We went to a golf and ski resort. But, none of us could golf. None of us could ski. So we were sort of like thinking... why did they pick golfing and skiing? But I think to a certain extent it was to show us how a different culture. That's my context.<sup>11</sup>



I was a single mom in McNair with three children. I lived that too. I think that makes my job, not unique, but I been there. I *was* McNair. I've lived McNair. I've gone through all the crap that students can go through while in McNair.<sup>12</sup>



Sometimes I think that if I had a support system back home that it wouldn't be as hard. When I graduated from college I was living— this is *so* awkward— but I was living with my

ex's father until I could find a job. I was in [situations] where I haven't had a place to live. I just committed to working my butt off. I think that was the most struggling time— the year after I graduated.<sup>13</sup>



I can remember a day where um I had no money and I could not buy any diapers ... and so she [my McNair Program director] came over to my dorm and we went shopping and she got him some diapers and I think she got him some other things.

She would like take him on occasion take him to the mall with her. He was like “her little McNair baby” that’s what she used to call him. “Oh my little McNair baby is here.” That’s what she used to call him.<sup>14</sup>



[When] I started my undergrad; I'd been out of school for 13 years. I had two children, a boy and a girl, 8 and 13. My undergrad experience was fun. My children would get off the bus at the university and we'd study there. A woman in one of my math classes was a McNair scholar [that's how I learned about McNair]. I started working in the office as a work study as a sophomore. The year before I graduated, I applied for it and became a McNair scholar.<sup>15</sup>



They are all tools. Tools to foster your success. Because as you move through academia, there are expectations that are put on you whether written or non-written, verbalized and not verbalized, expectations are put on you as to what you need to be able *do* to and how you need to be able to *be* in that environment. So those things are actually done purposefully. It's the reason we have the meetings that we have, it's the reason we have the people come speak to you. All of that is intentional. Because we want you to be successful.<sup>16</sup>



It's exposure. With the hard work especially in regards to getting the PhD. The students actually seeing people going through the process. A lot of the students coming back to share. I think the campus visits do wonderful. The conferences open their eyes to a whole new world of possibilities. I think it's exposure.<sup>17</sup>



I strongly feel McNair is graduate school preparation. For when you *get* there you have a set of tools that you can rely on, you can use, you can go fall back on to help you get through the tough times in grad school. The unknowns of grad school. You know about a

lot of the things that go on in grad school. You know about the application process. You know about the selection process. You know about money. About how to find money. Those kinds of things. That's the educational piece. You really know how to maneuver through. And, the first year is the toughest year. And if you have a skill base, you're more likely to stick it out. You know how to look for people to get your needs met. Resources. You know how to work your resources.<sup>18</sup>



It's exposure.<sup>19</sup>



*It was rigorous. There was a meeting every other Friday. And, if you weren't there you'd better have a good excuse and if you weren't there you had to check out a video on that subject and you had to write a reflection each time that you met about that particular meeting. Was it helpful? Wasn't it helpful. What could they do to make it more helpful? And like I said, it was required. It was mandated that you be there for these things or you weren't living up to the contract with McNair.<sup>20</sup>*



They were strict. They were really strict. It felt like we were in a camp. A boot camp.<sup>21</sup>



Since you've left we purchased a communication software called "Communication Fitness" for specifically our sophomores. They are getting their writing skills in tune before they start their research— before they start writing because a lot of our students were like "how do you do research?" "How do you write?" So we've put that in place this past year. We are now in a lab where students actually go into the lab and look at graduate programs and see what's out there and look at kinds of money. We have our handbook but now it's "get on the computer" and make them look. So that's what I'm talking about.<sup>22</sup>



McNair's goal is to persuade people to go to grad school, so they use conventions. They push logos. They tell you how to help your community so they appeal to your sense of emotion. I think it's rhetorical all over the place. I really do. [The CV and the statement of purpose] maybe they were tools? I think they were rhetorical tools.

Actually I think, because I'm a literacy scholar, I see more of a literacy event taking place because you're getting new knowledge. And I believe how you are taught and how you obtain information determines how you use it. So you're given this information: You can go to grad school and you're being taught a way of doing interviews of understanding what graduate work is about, and it's a literacy act. Probably want to say literacy event too.

Actually, Royster talks about the blurring of literacy acts and rhetoric. She talks about blurring the lines between literacy and rhetoric, and I think this is one of those instances.<sup>23</sup>



It helps you get to know yourself. Your strengths, your weaknesses. How do you enhance those, the ones that aren't as strong? What do you do? Ok. I know I need a tutor. I know I need to do this. Time management.

I love this program. I say that because of what's it's done for me but [in that] I try to help students too. [W]e really, really want our folks here to succeed.<sup>24</sup>



[I]t probably starts often as imitation because you've never really seen it before and it's like "huh, I think like what I saw." Or, "I like what I heard, how can I make that a part of me or a product of me?" So, I'm thinking initially it might start off as duplicating or repeating what you see and eventually you do grow into your own and you take those things you've been shown and you apply them to you and you make them a part of who you are.<sup>25</sup>



I used to think that identity was very soulful— that identity came from the soul. But then as I started reading more, I started seeing that identity was a choice, it's a construction. And I think I learned that in the McNair Program, that identity is a construction, and so we choose in some context the ways in which we present ourselves.<sup>26</sup>



[Y]es of course, you are imitating what you see, but you get to know why it becomes important and how to make it your own.



I think what I learned from McNair was more about commitment.... My heart was in it and I had committed to getting it done. So I think that's what I learned.



Maybe we need to go back and do an interview of past McNair students and ask what things we did [that] really helped you. And what things didn't help you. We do an exit



interview, when students leave [McNair] and ask those questions, but they don't know yet because they aren't *there* yet.

At the end of every year, we sit down and we say now how did this work? What did we think about that? This is our thirteenth year. Because I don't think at any time we can become complacent and say "We've got this all together and we can't say we've got this fine and there's no room for improvement." Because we really do care, and we want the students to be successful, we look at that every year.

What I could probably do is put a question or two on the alumni tracking form that relate to that exact topic. About, now that you are out of school, now that you're in a Masters program, what things were most helpful about McNair?<sup>27</sup>



I still stay in touch with my research mentor. I love her. She was my mentor before McNair. She was my mentor for 2 years while I was in the [McNair] program. Then when I went on to graduate school, she was who I bounced stuff off of, cried on her shoulder, then she was on my thesis committee. When I graduated... we kept in contact. It is awesome.<sup>28</sup>



I think that in McNair you actually have a cohort as well. We have this like undefined connection. What I've also found out is there is an element of leadership that I see [in the people I was in McNair with] that have gone on to do other things, in other states, at other graduate schools.<sup>29</sup>



We had a lot of handouts. I have program books from both years that show month-by-month of all the activities they had for us to do. So, textual materials in print, but also when other students would present there were also PowerPoints that were used. And, I think that there were some other materials used. We got to go visit campuses (mostly in our area) and conference presentation. There were multiple opportunities for us to present our research at conferences during that 2-year period, which, for the most part, undergraduates don't get to do.<sup>30</sup>



Connie has changed her presentation. She now talks about hitting the sales at the right time when they have the mass sales and things are 70% off. And going to Penny's and how to feel the fabric and she's really gone out of her way to come down to... she used to talk about Von Maur. She talks now about Target.

She told the girls to watch the cut.



They see; wow, they did an awesome job. They see something great. They come back polishing. They want to emulate the way it's done. We try to get you guys prepared. We don't want to set you up to fail. We don't want you to be embarrassed. So we give you some tools. It's up to you to use them.<sup>31</sup>



You do want to invest in that one nice interview suit.



I thought this stuff was so stupid. But I understand the context now that I'm a graduate student.

We had to do progress reports [on ourselves]. On top of progress reports, we had to do like a goal-setting personal statement. We had to do that at the beginning of McNair and then at the end of McNair. And it had to be like 3 to 4 pages long so a lot of people were whining about it. But it makes a lot of sense now.

A lot of the work we have to do [in grad school] that we don't get credit for, actually has a meaning to it. Cause as an undergrad you get into this theme of I'm writing this paper cause I need to get a grade. A lot of times we were just doing them [the McNair assignments] not necessarily thinking there's a meaning behind them.<sup>32</sup>



*I am glad I did McNair because I'm getting ready to earn a Masters Degree. And I wouldn't have stepped foot into a graduate program had I not heard of McNair and found that little tiny doorway that opened an idea that I- welfare recipient single mother of three.. . I never would have thought beyond that bachelor's degree had I not heard of McNair.<sup>33</sup>*

*It's sure working [for me].*



When I realized some of the things professors were saying and doing with students. It was like oh my god, no. I had a lot of trauma with some of my classes and things some professors had said. I had been in classes where instructors were not speaking the same language as students. You had to sit in class with a dictionary.

And, when I met Michele it was an eye opener for me I was like Wow there's someone like me. There's someone who thinks like me. Meeting her and seeing how some professors could be real people and seeing what a difference that made in my life. And students would come in and say "Ms Free I just don't understand. I don't know what they're talking about." I had to translate for them. Or they had have experiences where like Frerie, like a banking concept, where they were told just regurgitate everything [the professors] say.

It just broke my heart because I knew if they had just one professor that made a difference. So I said OK. O.k., I'll go back.<sup>34</sup>



I think if you make the decision to work in [the McNair] program, its got to be because you care and you really want to help. It can't be any other motivation because it's a lot of hard work. You wouldn't stay if it was based on anything else; you don't make enough money to stay. When the federal government is saying your program is level-funded for the next four years— make it work. And add people to your program. It's not for the money. It's not because it's such an easy going job. It's not because of those things. I think more than anything it's because you do care and because it's so rewarding when your students have success. You get to say I did make a difference. I did help somebody. And they're the better because of it. And you are too. You don't get the financial reward, but you get so much more.<sup>35</sup>



## RESULTS & SYNTHESIS

I asked my McNair program director to give me a definition of what McNair does. I told her she could not use their mission statement. She said, “McNair changes families.” I said, “You can bet I’m going to use that.” It’s a remarkable statement. And, in my case, it’s a *fact*. I’m finishing my MA. I was accepted into several PhD programs. My son Matthew is indeed going to study at Michigan State. And, I should have a professorship by the time Markie graduates, so that McNair can change his life too.

Throughout all of the data (the Five Voices), the instances of “rhetorical education,” “class,” and “gender”— or, more specifically, “motherhood” echo quite loudly. These “ways of being” are embodied in the lives of these McNair Scholars.

And, while we look at what aspects of McNair are/might be rhetorical, we also should mention that there are things that “a rhetorical education” *cannot* provide. Let me explain: There are repeated moments in my research that speak of financial crisis and/or hardship. These moments are moments in our lives that “rhetoric” cannot help with— and yet, the MSP *did* help. Well, more specifically, the individuals who are McNair program counselors and McNair directors helped their scholars who were in need. While a rhetorical education cannot provide diapers (49), one McNair program director did buy diapers. While a rhetorical education cannot hand a scholar money to keep their lights on (47), one McNair program counselor had tools to help her scholars with these financial hardships. LaWanda Holt-Fields said:

I think if you make the decision to work in [the McNair] program, its got to be *because you care and you really want to help*. It can’t be any other motivation because it’s a lot of hard work. You wouldn’t stay if it was based on anything else; you don’t make enough money to stay (emphasis mine).

These aspects of the McNair education reach far beyond the programmatic duties of the MSP. The *people* in McNair, discussed in this research, provide more than “a rhetorical education;” these folks help their scholars more than mere rhetoric ever could; “because [they] care and [they] really want to help.”

### **Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis for this research is a concept. There are three major concepts.

4. “A Rhetorical Education”
5. “Class”
6. “Gender”

### **Indicators**

The indicators for these three concepts are a series of keywords:

1. doing, being, exposure, imitation, repetition, speaking, writing, presenting
2. class, money, lack of money
3. kids, children

### **1. Doing, Being, Exposure, Imitation, Repetition, Speaking, Writing, Presenting**

Fleming tells us that the Progymnasmata is “a set of deep-seated verbal habits and dispositions oriented to public effectiveness and virtue.” One of the Five Voices said, “as you move through academia, there are expectations that are put on you whether written or non-written, verbalized and not verbalized, expectations are put on you as to what you need to be able do to and how you need to be able to be in that environment. So those things are actually done purposefully. It’s the reason we have the meetings that we have, it’s the reason we have the people come speak to you. All of that is intentional. Because we want you to be successful.” Another of the Five Voices said, “I’m thinking initially it might

start off as duplicating or repeating what you see and eventually you do grow into your own and you take those things you've been shown and you apply them to you and you make them a part of who you are." Fleming said, "The second component of "practice" in the classical system of rhetoric education was exercise: the working through by students of a program of well-defined and minutely focused drills and activities, repeated almost ad nauseum and sequenced so that new skills built on already acquired ones" (109). This description of McNair's curriculum sounds like a Progymnasmata.

## **2. Class, Money, Lack of Money**

Lindquist, Brodkey, and Borkowski all talk of "class." Mostly, though, they talk broadly. But in my data, one Voice says, I did McNair "because they gave you that \$1500." Seems *she needed the money* too. Throughout my literature review, I didn't see any information that was this personal, this *real*. And, while I did see the field talking about "class" in my literature review, that discussion centered on "working class." This leaves a great gap in our research, and in our publications. *Why doesn't the field publish more on this?* Victor Villanueva touches on being low income in *Bootstraps*. Mike Rose touches on it in *Lives on the Boundary*. But, through 15 years of four journals core to the field of Rhetoric and Composition, there was no mention of "low income." Certainly we need to turn our focus immediately to this disparity as there *are* low-income folks negotiating the halls of academe right now.

Sadly, we almost seem to avoid talking about money— much like Brodkey noted happening in her Literacy Letters. One Voice in my research though says, if you do McNair, "when you get [to graduate school] you have a set of tools that you can rely on, you can use, you can go fall back on to help you get through the tough times in grad

school.... You know about money. About how to find money.” While McNair does help its scholars to know how to ask for funding, often that funding is limited. And, how does someone without a McNair background learn to find and follow up on funding opportunities?

Sometimes McNair program staff even helped their scholars with financial need entirely outside of their job duties. As one of the Five Voices recalls: “I can remember a day where um I had no money and I could not buy any diapers ... and so she [my McNair Program director] came over to my dorm and we went shopping and she got him some diapers and I think she got him some other things.”



*[McNair is] giving people who can't afford to do  
what the privileged are doing [a chance].*

*--One Voice, Talkin' McNair*



### **3. Kids, Children**

While Brodkey mentions motherhood in the Literacy Letters, much more was not available for my review through our scholarly journals. No one in these journal articles said: “I was a single mom in McNair with 3 children; or, “[When] I started my undergrad, I’d been out of school for 13 years. I had two children, a boy and a girl, 8 and 13;” or, “I had 3 children I was raising by myself. They were 12, 10, and 9 when I stated my BA.” Whereas these statements were all made, verbatim, by my participants. This, to me, indicates a need for deeper study into the lives of mothers and children within Higher Ed.

### **Moving From Gender to Motherhood**

Does McNair look at instances of motherhood and try to help those with children

negotiate the often-confounding tasks of balancing home, Higher Ed, and children? Both program staff members I interviewed said to “bring the kids;” don’t miss something important because you don’t have a sitter. “Bring them.” They had not felt a need to incorporate a plan for childcare in the past, but probably would should a future situation warrant. Interestingly program staff said the demographics of their program were changing as more males than ever (6) are now enrolled in their McNair. Still, McNair staff indicated a willingness to review issues of “motherhood” in the future.

One McNair director took a special interest in the child of one of her participants. “She would like take him on occasion take him to the mall with her. He was like “her little McNair baby” that’s what she used to call him. “Oh my little McNair baby is here.” But this is above-and-beyond the scope of the program. What kinds of help can we in Higher Ed offer to mothers as they try to negotiate their personal lives with their academic ones?

### **Merging McNair into the Field**

Whether reading Lindquist or Brodkey, Borkowski or Brandt et al, class is present. And in most of the literature I reviewed, class issues are represented realistically– but at a distance. With perhaps the exception of Borkowski’s memoir, the remainder of the literature I reviewed in those peer-reviewed journals was not up-close; not-so-personal. But we heard, quite clearly, real events, real life in *Five Voices: Talkin’ McNair*. These folks have *lived* class burdens, and through McNair, have sought change– for themselves, and for their families. And while *Five Voices* are not enough to change what we’re doing about class in Rhetoric and Composition, these five voices do give us a starting point. Each voice offers a similar level of details about how class plays out getting to and once inside Higher Ed. This is a place for the field to start talking more deeply. We need to look at the



intimate details of what it's like to bring issues of class into the classroom— both undergraduate and graduate. We need to wear class as a badge of honor (Borkowski 110).



*You know how to work your resources.*

*--One Voice: Talkin' McNair*



## **IMPLICATIONS / DISCUSSION / DIRECTIONS**

When I think back to the beginnings of this study, I felt like the field did not talk much about class. I found that I was wrong— to a certain extent. The field does talk about class, but we talk about it at arm's length and not up close, personal, and out in the open. We talk about it in generalities. We talk about the big picture. And, we talk about *working class*. In our journals, we are not talking about the *working poor*.

I chose this study because I was a member of the lower class. My children and I were living off welfare and disability. I chose this study because finding my foothold in academe came through finding myself in the McNair Scholars Program. I chose this study because at WheatState University, when I was a McNair Scholar, there were only 20 of us on the whole campus. Now, the government has mandated that the WheatState program have 29 participants each year. Even if we think about the total numbers of lower-class students across the country who are being helped by this fantastic program— *this is not enough!* There were 7,200 new freshmen at MSU last year. (newsroom.msu.edu). What if a McNair-like curriculum could help them all to “invent their university?” I wish this study

could have looked at this since it was my original research question. But, this will make for a great follow-up research project.

## **AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This rhetorical education is not without its problems. Does McNair teach scholars “to conform to the norms?” As one of the Five Voices said, “We went to a golf and ski resort. But, none of us could golf. None of us could ski.” Was this a rhetorical moment, meant to show the McNair Scholar a new “class?” If so, perhaps it should have been made explicit. This Voice also said, “I used to think that identity was very soulful— that identity came from the soul. But then as I started reading more, I started seeing that identity was a choice, it’s a construction. And I think I learned that in the McNair Program, that identity is a construction, and so we choose in some context the ways in which we present ourselves.” Was the visit to the resort meant to help her contextualize her class status *as* someone inside academe? If these things were made explicit, maybe, then we could make more informed decisions about “the ways in which we present ourselves.”

Ms. Free went back to college, to graduate school, to *be* change. She said, “[S]tudents would come in and say, “Ms Free I just don’t understand. I don’t know what they’re talking about.” I had to translate for them. Or they had have experiences where like Frerie, like a banking concept, where they were told just regurgitate everything [the professors] say. It just broke my heart because I knew if they had just one professor that made a difference. So I said OK. O.k., I’ll go back.”<sup>36</sup> Although I mention being “an agent of change” in the footnotes, this concept certainly warrants further research. Ms. Free

invented her university as she went, and she did it with the help, the training, the encouragement, and the rigor of The McNair Scholars Program.

### **Replicating this Study**

While I doubt that this study could be replicated, it could, perhaps, be used as a model in other research projects. Life interviews such as I conducted bring to light details about people and about their situations. Allowing their words a place to be read can offer our field new ways of seeing class and new ways of helping our students negotiate these class barriers. The current trend to not talk about lower class is problematic and leaves many folks trying to find their footing in Higher Ed on their own. More research, more talk, more exposure can only help us help them.

### **Changing the Institution**

I began this research by asking if the McNair curriculum could be brought to bear on First Year Writing, and although I didn't get to answer this question in this particular study, I welcome other researchers to continue along these lines. If we triangulate between Bay's and Fleming's works inside the field, and the McNair curriculum, just outside the field, we can see that using a McNair curriculum in First Year Writing curricula could well help many students to invent their university. And, this may well be a possibility. More in-depth interviews and a broad-reaching study (perhaps a survey of McNair alumni across the country) would shed light on whether the curriculum of McNair could be enacted in the FYW classroom. Then, pilot courses in a First Year Writing program could confirm (or deny) the significance of a McNair-like curriculum to first-year students. Pilot courses would also shed light on the possible complications of such a program. Some of these complications might be: McNair serves a certain demographic. Their student body is 1"

generation, low income, underrepresented groups. The university's student body is more diverse, and does not meet these specific criteria. Also, McNair strives to have its scholars behave in certain ways (i.e., mode of dress, presentation style) which may not be best suited for the FYW classroom either. But, only further research would allow these ideas to be tested.

Fleming says that students with a successful training in a Progymnasmata will “emulate desirable features found therein.” Even if McNair is a Progymnasmata, we will need to conduct much new study to decide which features of McNair we want our First Year Writing students to emulate; we will need to test which features are truly desirable in our First Year Writing classrooms— and which ones are not.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

I believe my research brings together an accounting of the personal— my own, and others’— whose voices *need* to be here. Here, in Rhetoric and Composition. These voices “illustrate the importance of making visible the fissures, the gaps, and the compromises that shape academic discourse and academic lives” (Kirsch. Symposium Collective). These voices make visible the difficulties of negotiating issues of gender (motherhood) and often a lack of money while obtaining a rhetorical education. Further, by letting these voices rise up and be heard, we (the field) can begin to see how important this kind of research is, not only to this particular study, but also to many studies. If we gloss over or reduce the voices of our participants, or if we speak for them, we lose a mighty hefty chunk of what they have to say— we also lose authenticity. We stand to lose way too much if we do not listen,

and listen carefully and thoroughly, to those who live with issues of class and gender—while there are attempting to earn their rhetorical educations.

My study offers the field of Rhetoric and Composition a new approach theoretically in that, so far, we seem to be talking as a field about *working class* rhetoric. We don't, however, seem to be discussing *lower class* rhetoric. My theory is that we must begin to find ways to talk about both of these things. I recently read my "Charms & Chasms" essay at conference. The audience was literally silenced after my read. They had no notion how to respond to what is quite matter-of-fact for me. The joint replacements, the welfare, the issues of single mothering—they just didn't know what to say to me. Nope; there was a good two minutes of silence. We *must* find ways to talk about these things. We (the field) *cannot* be silent on these issues. These issues affect us, and they affect our students.

My study also offers the field of Rhetoric and Composition a new approach methodologically by combining traditional Rhet/Comp research methods coupled with methods derived from my Creative Writing background. We often interview participants in our studies, but we don't often let their voices come to the forefront of our reports and resonate. I found that often in our journal articles, we tend to gloss over our participants' voices with our own words. Methodologically, our studies often talk *of* people, but rarely let the people talk. I have shown one way we can let the people do the talkin'. I am sure there are other ways as well, and I welcome other researchers to take what they can from my methodology and make it their own— to adapt it, to perfect it. I think we (the field) can grow from this type of reporting. Now, we do see this type of reporting in many books (Rose, Villanueva, Madsen), and I anticipate a fascinating discovery process as I begin to dig into these texts. The first book— the one I can't wait to pick up— is *Reclaiming Class*

(Adair and Dahlberg, Eds). The subtitle points directly to my objects of inquiry: *Women, Poverty, and the Promise of Higher Education in America*. Sandy Smith Madsen, in her essay “From Welfare to Academe,” which is included in this edited collection says:

“I submit that the salient difference between welfare mothers who pursue higher education and those who do not is that some have been strong enough to resist the definitions imposed by an overclass that measures the potential of human beings on the basis of rank in class, race and gender hierarchies” (Adair and Dahlberg. 140)

Oh for the time and the space to elaborate on this text here and now. But, again, this research is limited to those four journals, core to our field. And, our peer-reviewed journals simply do not include near enough work on the working class or the working poor in academe. And, we don’t bring their voice to the forefront of our reporting. We don’t see this type of reporting in our journals– and here is our disconnect.

In addition to using creative writing as a method, I began to think that we may need to target different populations in our research. Maybe we need to re-theorize our understanding of social class? Maybe it’s as simple as relaxing our peer review process to let these Other voices into our journals? I do not know the answer. But, these are all, certainly, possibilities.

Meanwhile, if we reflect on the texts in my literature review, together with the Five Voices (my data), we “illustrate... the tensions surrounding the politics of the personal ... [W]hat counts as the personal is very much defined and delimited by current academic as well as Western cultural norms, *norms that exclude as much as they include.*” (Symposium Collective. Gesa Kirsch. 55. emphasis mine.). This makes these five voices all the more pertinent as we (the field) need to be more detail oriented here– we need to be more inclusive; “we need something different from us” (Berlin 20).

Perhaps future researchers could employ a similar methodology to this one, because by way of its methodology and its inclusion of these folks' voices— these folks who live with issues of class struggle and motherhood, this study does offer up to the field a little bit of that *something different*.



I called Jamie yesterday. I told her I needed a little sanity.

She asked me what was wrong. I told her I was afraid my attitudes about McNair were changing; I was no longer sure they were the reason I was thriving in graduate school.

Jamie was floored. “How could you,” she asked?

“Well, I just got to thinking about all the ways they wanted me to change, and I began wondering if they expect me to wear a friggin’ business suit to class,” I said. Jamie laughed.

Jamie told me I might not need to wear that suit to class, or even for conference presentations, but it sure was that one off-white linen suit I wore to my McNair interview that helped me get my foot inside their door.

She went on: “And, from that point on, what McNair did was give you some tools. Those tools McNair gave you helped you to know how to *do* Higher Ed. McNair’s tools, Sue, are like advice, you get to decide what you want to take from them, what you leave behind; you take that advice and you mold it to suit yourself.” We giggled at her pun.

Jamie asked me where I’d be without McNair. I paused and then said, “I’d have a Bachelor’s degree in Creative Writing and... be... um... managing a McDonald’ somewhere, I guess.” We laughed.

What my McNair director said is true for me; McNair changes lives.



## **APPENDICES**

### **Interview Scripts**

**Situating the Moment**

**McNair Scholars**

**McNair Program Staff**

### **Interview Transcripts**

**Free**

**LaWanda**

**Sue**

**Violet**

**Sugar**



## **INTERVIEW SCRIPTS**

### **Situating the Moment**

Let us situate our conversation beginning in your undergrad degree.

What were you majoring in?

What year was it?

Were you planning on going to graduate school?

If you would, tell me about your life outside academe at that time..

Children?

Age?

Class status?

Health?

When did you hear of McNair?

How did you find out ?

Why did you want to apply to McNair?

So, were you in for 1 year or 2?

Tell me a little in general about year 1

Tell me a little in general about year 2 (research)

What did you research?

Do you still see/keep in touch with your mentor?

Tell me a specific story from one of those years.

Can be a “good” memory of being in McNair, but can also be a tension.

Struggles?

Triumphs?

What did you do?

How did you feel about the activities?

Tell me why you are glad you did McNair..

Tell me why (if) McNair failed you in any way..

**Suzanne Webb**

**Interview Script**

**Questions of McNair Scholars**

History of formal writing instruction

History of non-formal writing instruction

1. What do you remember about being in McNair (the actual instruction)?
2. What materials were used?
3. What years were you (are you) in the McNair program?
4. How did you find out about McNair?
5. What made you want to be in McNair?
6. How often did you attend McNair functions/classes/sessions
7. What types of functions/classes/sessions did you have?
8. Were there assignments?
9. What did you learn through McNair?
10. How did you feel about your learning?
11. What did you do in McNair that was Textual?
12. What did you do in McNair that was Visual?
13. What did you do in McNair that was Ethical (ethically-based)?
14. How did you feel about what McNair taught you?
15. What was special about your McNair program?
16. Did you keep anything from the program? Books, letters, written material etc?

17. Are you currently in graduate school? As an MA? A PhD? Have you completed both? Neither?
18. How did you carry this along in your life? Institutional, work, family, church, community.

### **Questions of McNair Program Staff**

History of formal writing instruction

History of non-formal writing instruction

1. What made you decide to be a McNair staff member?
2. Were you a McNair Scholar?
3. Did you obtain your PhD?
4. What are the established goals of the McNair program?
5. Who can be a McNair Scholar?
6. Does this McNair office at Wichita State University (WSU) have any additional goals or additional activities that are not mandated by the TRIO office?
7. How long has this McNair program been here?
8. How many students has this program served locally?
9. How many students has it served successfully (and could you define “success” in McNair first)
10. What was your training?
11. What was your relationship with the students?
12. Did your relationship with the students go beyond the program?

13. How did you carry this experience in your life? Institutional, work, family, church, community?
14. Could you talk a little about what McNair does?
15. What do program members do in McNair that is Textual?
16. What do program members do in McNair that is Visual?
17. What did program members do in McNair that is Ethical (ethically-based)
18. Do you track McNair alums after they complete their Bachelor degrees?
19. For how long and for what purpose?
20. How do you measure the success of the program?
21. What is special about your McNair program?

**Interview Script: Questions of McNair Program Staff**

PICK A PSEUDONYMN: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) What made you decide to be a McNair staff member?
- 2) Were you a McNair Scholar?
- 3) Did you obtain your PhD?
- 4) What are the established goals of the McNair program?
- 5) Who can be a McNair Scholar?
- 6) Does this McNair office at Wichita State University (WSU) have any additional goals or additional activities that are not mandated by the TRIO office?
- 7) How long has this McNair program been here?
- 8) How many students has this program served locally?

9) How many students has it served successfully (and could you define “success” in McNair first)

10) What was your training?

11) What was your relationship with the scholars?

12) Did your relationship with the students go beyond the program?

1. Is it always strictly professional or have you had friendships that carried outside of the program req's?

2. Do you ever provide services from a personal standpoint. For example, on of the McNair scholars I interviewed had a young baby and no money and the program director came and took her and the baby shopping for diapers and other necessities.. .

3. Can you tell me a story of “support above-and-beyond” the McNair program req's?

13) How do you carry this experience in your life? Institutional, work, family, church, community?

14) Could you talk a little about what McNair does? Activities / etc.

15) What do program members do in McNair that is Textual?

16) What do program members do in McNair that is Visual?

17) What did program members do in McNair that is Ethical (ethically-based)

18) Do you track McNair alums after they complete their Bachelor degrees?

19) For how long and for what purpose?

20) How do you measure the success of your program?

What is special about your McNair prog?

### **Free– an interview about McNair**

I started my undergrad. I'd been out of school for 13 years. I had two children, a boy and a girl, 8 and 13. My undergrad experience was fun. My children would get off the bus at the university and we'd study there. A woman in one of my math classes was a McNair scholar [that's how I learned about McNair]. I started working in the office as a work study as a sophomore. The year before I graduated, I applied for it and became a McNair scholar. I was there for one summer. It had to be 96-97. My mentor was a McNair Scholar. I knew that I could get her [my mentor] to mentor me. The director [of McNair] liked people to come in with a mentor in mind.

I am still friends with my mentor– Michele. I see her all the time. She came to my graduation. She's great. I didn't know– she's the one who told me I could go to grad school. I took her class the summer before McNair. We got to be friends because she was around my age– I wasn't young. I went back to school when I was 31 for my undergrad.

She said you can go to grad school.... I got to know her. We would have coffee. She sponsored this student organization. She asked me and a couple of my friends to start this organization and we got to be friends. *She was folks*. She was real people. I was like wow she's got a PhD. And there were these professors that were way out there. They were like creatures that farted pink clouds. My thinking was that you had to be super-super smart. And it was something you were born with to be a professor. And when I met Michele, it was like wow. But that's weird because my grandmother had a PhD. But my parents never talked about it. I didn't get what a PhD was. My dad got his degree in accounting about 10 years ago. My mother is a para legal and she just went back to school. She just got her master's degree in education 2 years ago.

She said you know you can go to grad school; you have the intellect; you're really smart.

I wasn't really thinking about all that. So, we did the summer research program. And actually she showed me how to do research. It was her project, I had to write a paper for it... She took me to Florida with her [to do the research] and it was just *so much fun*. [12:49] I was like *Wow*, this is what you can do with a PhD as a professor? I know she went above what mentors do. Maybe because we had similar stories. We were about the same age. We just became very connected. We became friends. I just don't think you can have that same relation as a 20 or 22 year old with a 50 or 60-year old professor.

*Were there other activities involved besides just working with Michele and doing that research?*

*Oh yeah.* We had class practically every day. We had GRE LSTAT and GMAT prep. You went to group for that. Then they had how to write a purpose statement. How to fill out an application. We were being taught how to all these things for grad school. This was a year before we were going to graduate. They said go visit the school. They were teaching us how to get in to grad school. And because we were scholars, all our applications at McNair schools were free. I took advantage of that. But, I didn't go straight from undergrad into grad school. I sat out 2 years. I worked. I worked as an academic advisor in the university that I got my undergrad in. And, I thought I would love it. Actually, if I didn't go to graduate school, that was like the perfect job. I liked doing that. It was fun.

When I realized some of the things professors were saying and doing with students. It was like oh my god, no. I had a lot of trauma with some of my classes and things some



professors had said. And, being a nontraditional student I was so I eager. I was so eager.... I'm at the front of the class. I didn't get the best grades, but I got the best grades I could. I ended up with a cumulative 2.7 at undergrad. And I hit the pits with the GRE. And, that's not good enough for graduate school. But, my personal statement, and just who I was a person and I took a risk and that's what got me into a major Research 1 program. U of Wisc. Madison.

We workshopped [the statement of purpose] we peer reviewed and edited it. Then, when we went to the National Conference, it was at Purdue, there were workshops that were similar where you had to present. That was the first conference I ever presented at. And I was an undergrad. All of us went because we were McNair Scholars. There were 2 of us that were experienced. Like over 30. Everybody had to share a room. Except for me and this other woman. I'm sure somebody set that up for us. *Our own room*. Which was very, very cool. We also had at the end of the summer, we had a conference too. All of the scholars and mentors got together and presented their work and I thought that was special. [From that research project] I got my writing sample when I applied to grad school. I got something else out of it to. That project lasted me a while.

We had a big ole binder. [In it was] our daily schedule. I know samples of purpose statements and writing samples. There was stuff I think was really interesting now. Then, I thought it was common sense. Of course you dress appropriately when you go an interview or when you go to a campus visit. But I had to be like 35 or 36 so a lot of stuff was common sense. But, some folks don't know that.

The assistant director– this guy– drove a Mercedes and wore tailored shirts with cufflinks and \$300 shoes. And he’s telling the men this is how to dress. These kids barely have a job!

I remember we had a cohort. And I was the oldest. Almost everybody was of color. I’m trying to remember if there were any white people.

*What kinds of support network did you have outside of school?*

My family during exams would keep my kids for me. I had friends who my kids could hang out with. I made friends on campus... Mostly faculty and staff, because they were my age.

My daughter. I got a lot of accolades and I was doing really well. And she was in high school this was during my undergrad career and she wasn’t doing so well. I used to talk to her and ask what do you need. How can I help with your studies and I wasn’t getting through to her.. and I said why can’t you get it together? Why can’t you do your studies? And she rounded on me and said you don’t understand. Mom you are so successful and you are an overachiever and you are a hard act to follow and it’s difficult being your daughter. She saw how hard I worked. I got up early in the morning and got them breakfast and got them off to school and I studies and I think she saw it being something she couldn’t achieve because she saw it as too difficult.

I would like to thank my ex husband for paying his child support forthright and on time.

I took out loans. \$700 a month now.

I felt like McNair did what they were supposed to do. I felt like I was an exception. I saw people who just struggled. They had terrible mentors. Or, they just seemed they

weren't having a good experience. I'd been in the workforce. I knew how to write a resume. The thing I needed the most was how to study for the GRE how to do the application. I needed the academic side of things. Honestly, I wasn't thinking about going to grad school. I was hanging out at McNair because they gave you that \$1500. I didn't think I could get in grad school and I figured it can't hurt, and it was summer and I needed some money.

McNair as a rhetorical education..

McNair's goal is to persuade people to go to grad school so they use conventions. They push logos. They tell you how to help your community so they appeal to your sense of emotion. I think it's rhetorical all over the place. I really do. [The CV and the statement of purpose] maybe they were tools? I think they were rhetorical tools. Actually I think, because I'm a literacy scholar, I see more of a literacy event taking place because you're getting new knowledge. And I believe how you are taught and how you obtain information determines how you use it. So you're given this information: You can go to grad school and you're being taught a way of doing interviews of understanding what graduate work is about and it's a literacy act. Probably want to say literacy event too. Actually Royster talks about the blurring of literacy acts and rhetoric. She talks about blurring the lines between literacy and rhetoric, and I think this is one of those instances.

McNair was a piece of cake. Multi tasking. I have to learn how to multitask. It boggles my mind. In graduate school I took 3 classes, taught and wrote a thesis... and now it's more hectic.

(44:03)

**The reason you wanted to go to grad school..**

*... about things professors said...*

When I was an academic advisor, my students would come in and say that they were in a classroom and an instructor would call the Middle Passage in slavery “an unfortunate immigration.”

I had been in classes where instructors were not speaking the same language as students. You had to sit in class with a dictionary. And, when I met Michele it was an eye opener for me I was like Wow there’s someone like me. There’s someone who thinks like me. Meeting her and seeing how some professors could be real people and seeing what a difference that made in my life. And students would come in and say “Ms Free I just don’t understand. I don’t know what they’re talking about. I had to translate for them. Or they had have experiences where like Frerie like a banking concept where they were told just regurgitate everything I say.. . It just broke my heart because I knew if they had just one professor that made a difference. So I said OK. Ok, I’ll go back.

I felt like a lot of the administrators looked down on me because all I had was a bachelor’s degree. All the committees meetings were with people with Masters and PhDs and really they didn’t really know any more than I did. But I thought I could make a difference in policy and stuff like that and how students got treated and be an advocate. I felt like I’d have more power with more education.

Students who don’t know how to do school, you can tell. They’ve never been taught how to study. You can tell. One of the things I learned in McNair was that when you take like the GRE you can’t enhance your knowledge, but you can learn how to take the test. They taught us to practice. They told us to practice it twice a week.

My program did not require it [the GRE]. I deliberately looked for a program that did not require it [the GRE].

*(me too!)*

You talk about class– They’re [McNair] giving people who can’t afford to do what the privileged are doing, especially with that test. Because Kaplan’s been around for years and privileged people are sending their kids to Kaplan and paying 3-400 dollars so they can get good scores and get into the good schools. And people who are not privileged, who don’t have the socio-economic capabilities they’re not getting into the programs. So you have McNair who comes in and teaches us the same thing. I took the test twice, and I did worse the second time. We got to take it for free.

I started Fall ’99 to spring 2006.

I’m 46 now.

I think the advantage is when you have life experiences you are like “whatever.”

SRS in Wichita.

AFPC in Wisconsin.

(Where ya get your foodstamps).

My kids were pretty self sufficient. A 14 year old daughter and a 8 yr old son. So, they could fix their own meals. I don’t know how people do it with small kids.

## **Lawanda**

There wasn't McNair when I was in school. I worked at the admissions office on campus. They had written a grant, and received it, and they were looking for staff members. [This is at the very inception of McNair] in 1995. [WheatState] currently has 28 scholars. It was 25 originally, then scaled back to 20, now it's at 28.

LaWanda— still being MY McNair program director and giving me advice about PhD programs and such...

You have to look at *everything* that is affected by it [the decision of which PhD program] .

To make you pick your own brain. What would be my benefits for staying as well as leaving.

McNair came to campus in 1995.

How many students has the program served?

It's about 166.

What is the rate of return on PhD attainment?

We only have 1.

Unfortunately, according to regulations, other doctorate degrees don't' count.

3 JDs and 2 MDs

It has to be a PhD or a EdD.

*Does the program at WSU differ from the national regulations?*

There are certain aspects that the Dept of Education wants us to make sure we cover, but the route in which we get there is totally up to us. For instance, the 3 programs

in the state of Kansas.. some programs are strictly summer research. Some programs pay their faculty to work with their students. We don't.

I can't imagine that they don't run into the same issues that we do.

If I give a faculty person 200 bucks, is that going to make them more committed to you as a student? Maybe. Maybe.

This year we were able to buy laptops so students could have laptops for the whole semester.

*You've added a sophomore year component with a computer software to help improve writing skills.. Could you talk through the process of how did you decide to add the sophomores and the writing component because those weren't in place when I was there.*

I went to a conference and ran into a colleague that ran a program who shared that they ran their program in three components.... When we got the word that we had to increase our size, but weren't going to get more money, and sophomores aren't allowed to do research, what would be the benefit of bringing them [the sophomores] into the program? What could they get out of it? And, what would cost us the least amount of money. Because we want to provide them services. We had the program set up in two components- the mentoring and the research- so if we bring in this third set of students that can't do research, why would they want to be in the program? What do they have to gain? And, how can we keep them engaged? What would be different so that as they progressed through the different components so that they'd get something different in each section of the program. We knew the Dept of Ed was making us increase our numbers.

How could we best serve those new students. We had to increase our students but we wouldn't get more money.

You don't have a lot of money for variations.

Salaries-stipends-fringe benefits like a COL increase.

You have to add in all those variables to your little \$250,000.

## REFLECTION

*So, it sounds like you went through a bit of a reflective process on how to best serve those new students?*

Most definitely.

*You said you had students who didn't finish the research component, does that lead you to think about how to get a better return on the research component? A better finish rate?*

We really do spend quite a bit of time looking at that what could we have done differently? How could we have approached the student differently? Sometimes there's nothing we can do because it's an outside force that affects what's going on. People have different values. People have different levels of commitment. Or, maybe they don't know about commitment at all.

*Do you ever see that difference in a traditional or non-traditional [students] do you have better success rates with traditional-aged students or better success rates with non-traditional-aged students. Have you ever looked at that?*

We've never mapped that out. We've never looked at that, but if I were just to reflect, 9 times out of 10 it's a traditional-aged student [that has more problems getting through everything]. Whether it's just lack of experience that makes a difference or values, you know, it's hard to say.



*4 out of 4 of my interviews were mothers as we've tried to do this whole crazy academic thing. 4 out of 4 stuck it out. One girl has her PhD, 2 of us are MA students, 1 has her MA. I don't know how well I can tie motherhood into this research. What I look at are class and gender in respect to a McNair education because those are things that affect me and hit home with me.*

*One of the girls formed really strong friendship with her mentor and one had developed an ongoing friendship with her program director. Would you say that you'd formed friendships that go beyond the program?*

I would. I would. I have a student that while she was in the program, she traveled a lot, and she'd always send me a post card from wherever she went and even after she graduated from the program, she continued to do that. I have students who will come back and visit me. Students that email me. They just keep me updated on what they're doing and how their lives are going. People will tell me I got married. I had a baby. Part of that is that we're required to track our students until they get their PhD and so we keep in touch with them— probably some of them when they don't want to keep in touch.

And I looked up that number. It's actually 183.

*That's a lot of people that you've helped.*

It's very rewarding.

*Now, don't tell me the mission statement; tell me what McNair does. In your words.*

Wow.... What we do, the mission statement says, that we help prepare 1st-generation low income college students for graduate school. What I we do is

We change families.

Because, I can't help you without affecting your boys. Probably not without even affecting your ex-husband. Your siblings. When I help you, and you are successful at reaching your goals, you affect all those people around you. Because you become a change agent.

Just give me my by line.

*Everyone else I said you want to pick a pseudonym?*

Oh don't worry about me.

*Do you have any mothers in the program now?*

Yeah. 28 students. Only.. well we have the largest number of males that we've ever had. It's like OMG we have boys! Who knew we could have boys?... We have 9 men which is absolutely awesome.

#### **TEXTUAL ORAL VISUAL ETHICAL**

Those are the tangible things.

*Can you speak to those 4 things?*

They are all tools. Tools to foster your success. Because as you move through academia, there are expectations that are put on you whether written or non-written, verbalized and not verbalized, expectations are put on you as to what you need to be able *do* to and how you need to be able to *be* in that environment. So those things are actually done purposefully. It's the reason we have the meetings that we have, it's the reason we have the people come speak to you. All of that is intentional. Because we want you to be successful.

*Is there a repetition or an imitation aspect involved?*

I think a bit of both. For most of the students that come to the program, it probably starts often as imitation because you've never really seen it before and it's like "huh, I think like what I saw." Or, "I like what I heard, how can I make that a part of me or a product of me?" So, I'm thinking initially it might start off as duplicating or repeating what you see and eventually you do grow into your own and you take those things you've been shown and you apply them to you and you make them a part of who you are.

We have students where we say: "We need to do a mock presentation to get you ready to go to this conference." And they say I think I'm ok. But we say We want to make sure you're ready. And they buck the system. And maybe they don't show up and what happens when they go to the conference? You're not prepared. Your presentation is choppy. You are not nearly as polished as you could be because you feel like you've already arrived. So where we're frustrated with you because you didn't do what we told you to do, it's also a learning opportunity for you. You can see that we weren't trying to just give you busy work. We weren't trying to be dictators. We really did have your best interest at heart. This was not about us. It's an opportunity to learn. That's what I think for McNair about the whole imitation \_\_\_\_ yes of course, you are imitating what you see, but you get to know why it becomes important and how to make it your own.

Whether its how to write or how to dress for conferences.. .

Believe me, we have plenty people buck that system about how to dress.... It's like "I know that's cute but it's probably not appropriate." ...

*The ones that get taken the most seriously are the ones that are serious about their dress, about their presentation, serious about practice, they are the ones that get listened to and maybe even cited. Connie came and talked to us about how to dress. She talked about shopping at Talbot's.*

You didn't come in your jeans and your t-shirt.

*To me that may be age and life experience to have intuitive feel for those kinds of moves.*

I purchased a book for office use that is all about dress. Some people may say that's not really that important but they say you only get about 7 seconds to make a first impression. The book is *In Style/Instant Style: Your Season-by-Season Guide for Work and Weekend*. It talks about kinds of skirts and kinds of shoes.... [Suitable business attire] is what we're required to do. And the time to make statements is not before they offer you the job. The time to make a statement is wait till you have a job.

*Get your job then make your statement. The unrepresented people that aren't here (in academe) get to be here and then we get here and we can make change.*

That's the whole point is ... you can [go to grad school]. You can. Even though nobody's told you you can, you can. And, this is how we're going to do it.

Maybe we need to go back and do an interview of past McNair students and ask what things we did really helped you. And what things didn't help you. We do an exit interview, when students leave [McNair] and ask those questions, but they don't know yet because they aren't *there* [in graduate school] yet.

At the end of every year, we sit down and we say now how did this work? What did we think about that? This is our 13<sup>th</sup> year. Because I don't think at any time we can become complacent and say "We've got this all together and we can't say we've got this fine and there's no room for improvement." Because we really do care, and we want the

students to be successful, we look at that every year. What I could probably do is put a question or two on the alumni tracking form that relate to that exact topic. About, now that you are out of school, now that you're in a Masters program, what things were most helpful about McNair?

*Did this conversation between you and I just spark that fabulous idea?*

*Children*

Bring the kids! We've never thought about providing day care. There are certain things we can spend money on and things that we can't.

*That reflective process that you guys do that keeps the program going, viable, and new.*

*Its based on the level about how much you and Shukura care is why we had such a thorough experience in our McNair program.*

I think if you make the decision to work in a TRIO program, its got to be because you care and you really want to help. It can't be any other motivation because it's a lot of hard work. You wouldn't stay if it was based on anything else; you don't make enough money to stay. When the federal government is saying your program is level-funded for the next four years— make it work. And add people to your program. It's not for the money. It's not because it's such an easy going job. It's not because of those things. I think more than anything it's because you do care and because it's so rewarding when your students have success. You get to say I did make a difference. I did help somebody. And they're the better because of it. And you are too. You don't get the financial reward, but you get so much more.

**Sue: an interview about McNair**

I hadn't even thought about graduate school.

Pell grants run out at the end of the bachelor's degree.

Life outside of academe 2002-05

Lot of health problems.

Arthritis.

Joints needing replaced.

I had 3 children I was raising by myself.

They were 12, 10, and 9 when I stated my BA

My class status at that time?

Poor white girl. On welfare. Getting food stamps.

Nuthin' but poor.

I ended up in this career development class. I had to take 12 [hours] to get the full student loans and the full pell grants. One night the teacher says something about McNair bladdablada blah.

They prepare students for graduate level work. I said *who gets to do that?* She said, well a lot of people do. Would you like them to come to our class? I'm like Yeah, bring 'em let's see what they have to say. So, that's the first indication ever that I had that I could go to grad school.

As I finished my associates and started my bachelor's degree, I had a professor who saw something in me. She said she'd like me to teach for the community college. So, I'd just earned an associates and they want me to teach college. I'm like can you do that? She said well I am starting a "grow your own instructor program" and You're who I want to be

one of my instructors. Doing that [teaching] for the 2 or 3 semesters before this career development course I realized one I had a blast in the classroom as a leader in the classroom. And the students really liked me. I was surprised. I was nominated for a teaching award. So I'm thinking I'm kinda good at this. It's fun. So, maybe I should go to grad school and become a teacher. So I'm asking the professor "how do you get to do this full time?" and she said I needed a Masters Degree.

I was in McNair for 2 years. The first year is the mentor-track. So I found a professor out of the blue. I was in a sociology class and I liked his classroom demeanor. He threw his chalk, he dropped his book on the floor, he cut up with the students. He was a goof and he was opening my eyes to things I'd never even heard of. So, I liked him for his personality so I asked him if he would mentor me. I asked him if he had work [research] for me that I could do for him and that would qualify us for McNair. His name was Tor. Short for Victor. You don't call him Victor; you call him Tor. I worked with him closely looking at social alienation and the American Dream. He felt that social alienation was keeping people from being able to earn their American Dream, from being able to attain it. So, I did some research for him that year.

McNair had a student group meeting every other week. Like "how to write a CV" or how to dress for a professional aura—how to dress for conferences. But the first year was basically just that. And once a month on Saturday mornings they'd [McNair] would bring in a PhD who talked about what it was like in grad school, or how to find funding, —look up FLS—

Second year I did a research tract with them. At the end of year one, they offered me a \$1250 research stipend. Which was on my mind “ah the money.” So over the course of the [Research] year, you write a research proposal. You request funds to help you with that project. I worked with the same mentor, with Tor again. So, lit review, abstracts, summaries, full-blown scholarly research at the end of it. A lot of McNair scholars conducted their own research. Tor and I looked at G-Something. Some kind of sociology research that was already compiled, we just looked at it in a different way. And, at the end of that second year you presented your research at the research symposium, and if all was well, then you got twelve hundred and fifty bucks.

We looked at the factors present... I don't know. He said look at this . I looked at it. I compiled it. Synthesized it into this lit review. He looked at it. He said he'd take it to a national conference. He said I could but there was no travel money. So, he went and presented it. After that he pretty much disappeared on me.

The story about my mentor kind of flying the coup after two years of working with him... doesn't affect how I feel about McNair. It affected me how I feel about him. But right at the end, on top of all this going on with my mentor, in the summer McNair brings in a writing consultant to help all of the McNair scholars write the final drafts of their papers. And, I'd been in close contact with her. She says Sue this is looking good. Its looking great; it's going to be fine. I say do you have feedback? She says I'll get you some. I walk into the McNair office one afternoon and there she sits at a computer open in Word and she is changing my paper. [I said] What the hell are ya doin? That's my paper. You don't get to edit it. If there's something wrong with it, you should come to me to edit it. So I made an appointment to talk to the McNair director. I said look we've got a problem.



This lady is rewriting my paper. I said if there's something wrong with my paper she should have let me know. I can not work with her and I cannot condone what she's doing. The McNair [director] says what do you want to do? I said well I don't know. I wanted to get it published like we'd talked about. She said at this point there's only room for an executive summary that gets published. I said ok-fine-whatever. There's only room for two papers out of [20] that I understand. She said I'll tell you what, why don't you work with our student writing consultant on the executive summary till you and her are happy with the executive summary and we'll go with that. And we won't use what Jan was doing. And I said fine good enough and I let it ride. But I look back on it and at the moment I knew it was unethical and I still know it was unethical and I wonder has Jan gotten to other papers the same way. But I don't know. And you know it could have even been that I was working with a sociologist from a sociology standpoint. She was a PhD in Psychology. That's a very different way of looking at things too. I don't know if it was the technicalities; did she want a thesis statement and 3 or 4 supporting sentences and a concluding statement in each paragraph and I didn't do that? I don't know the details of why she rewrote it. I just know that I'd never do that to anybody...

The activities.. the structured McNair activities. Whenever I talk about McNair I say They're a prep track for grad school.. they taught me 1 week how to write a cv, one week how to apply to graduate programs, one week how to write a personal statement, one week how to dress. So it's these activities that I felt were very much building blocks that helped me get accepted into the 2 grad schools that I ended up applying to. So, those activities were probably imperative. How would I have known how to write a statement of

purpose? How would I have known what grad schools want out of a prospective student? I wouldn't have without those specific activities that McNair showed me how to do.

I am glad I did McNair because I'm getting ready to earn a Masters Degree. And I wouldn't have stepped foot into a graduate program had I not heard of McNair and found that little tiny doorway that opened an idea that I—welfare recipient single mother of three.. . I never would have thought beyond that bachelor's degree had I not heard of McNair.

Even with the goings on with the Mentor and the writing consultant I never felt that McNair failed me. I've known of other people who went into acting instead of going into acting instead of going into graduate school—one of the girls in my McNair program. I've known of other people who've complained about McNair a little bit, but me personally, it's thanks to McNair that I am where I am today.

... What do you remember about being in McNair in terms of the actual instruction..

It was rigorous. There was a meeting every other Friday. And, if you weren't there you'd better have a good excuse and if you weren't there you had to check out a video on that subject and you had to write a reflection each time that you met about that particular meeting. Was it helpful? Wasn't it helpful. What could they do to make it more helpful? And like I said, it was required. It was mandated that you be there for these things or you weren't living up to the contract with McNair.

We had a lot of handouts. I have program books from both years that show month-by-month of all the activities they had for us to do. So, textual materials in print but also when other students would present there were also PowerPoints that were used.

And, I think that there were some other materials used. We got to go visit campuses (mostly in our area) and conference presentation. There were multiple opportunities for us to present our research at conferences during that 2-year period, which, for the most part, undergraduates don't get to do.

We had things to produce. So, if the CV lady came and talked about CVs by the time I was to apply to graduate schools (and McNair has a policy that you apply to 3 PhD programs. I didn't live up to that, I applied to 2 MA programs instead. But they still passed me. I tweaked the rules). What the hell was the question? Oh. Assignments. Ok. So if the cv lady came to talk about cv's, then by the time I applied to a grad program, I needed a cv in hand. So, it wasn't a here you go this week have it done next week, but it was a here you go start working on this and it was a growing living piece of work over the course of that year. Same with a statement of purpose. You worked on it then someone else read it then you worked on it some more so it was almost a peer editing or a writing workshop kinda thing. But those materials were required. Research proposal was required. A lit review was required. A summary was required. An abstract was required. And, that finished piece of scholarly work at the end.

#### TEXTUAL / VISUAL

For our symposium, and conferences presentations, we had a paper. I wrote this paper. Now people giggled at me 'cause I started my presentation at conferences with "Hi, how are ya? Hi how you doing today? Hello. " And, they giggled at me. *No one does that.* – I'm doing it. I'm going to say I came to talk *with* you today. I didn't come to talk *at* you. So I had this textual piece but I also had a script that I used as I gave my presentation. Both of those are textual. McNair wanted a PowerPoint and went to great lengths to talk

about PowerPoints not having too much data on a slide. Use as many slides as you need. They didn't really give us a template, but we used something plain. Like a dark blue background with white type. Something with high contrast. And these things we talked about as we produced those visual pieces. We also had a poster board competition. So we reproduced, remixed our research piece not only into presentations and into PowerPoints but also onto a poster— those 3ftx4ft poster boards. I'd also say that weekly meeting on how to dress— that's visual representation too. You don't come to the symposium in your jeans. You don't wear your shirts too low. So they talked to us about what that professional attitude is about how to dress for professional situations. Be that right or wrong there was a certain way of dressing that they wanted us to emulate.

#### ETHICALLY-BASED

I learned a lot about how to interact with other people on a professional basis. I can pinpoint it into words. They never said “be ethical” but I thought they (the program director and the program counselor) *were* ethical. They were always first to be there for someone. Oh you're having trouble with this class let us get you a tutor. They were just very up front and very honest people and that rubbed off on me too.

It's interesting.. I bonded with the administrative assistant. I really liked her... But I don't have any real strong bonding friendships from that. I don't have a lasting friendship with my mentor, what was special about it was these techniques that I learned— these *ways of being* while I was in McNair turned out to be the same *ways of being* in graduate school. You're always on the go. You got a thousand meetings. You got things you got to do every other Friday that are above and beyond your course work. Research proposals have to be written. Abstracts have to be written. Calls [CFPs] have to be answered. What was special

about McNair for me is that it showed me step-by-step– like a miniature graduate school education. Same thing then as I’m doing now. Only I think the stakes might be higher now.

I got an award at the symposium. The Superstar award. I think they made it up for me. For overcoming obstacles.

How do I carry [McNair forward] into my life? The things I took with me...whether or not it’s graduate school we go on to do from our bachelor’s degrees.... We need to be able to work– sometimes at a damn-fast pace. Thoroughly. If I teach a class I look at these textual, visual, oral components that I learned at McNair. How to present. How to dress myself. How to make a good PowerPoint. How to engage an audience. How to do scholarly research. These are the things I carry with me from McNair.

## Violet and McNair

*(INTERESTING NOTE: arrives for interview with 4-yr-old Christopher in tow.)*

Laughter

*So in 2005-2006 you were in McNair.*

No, 2004 and 2005. those were the 2 years I was in McNair.

So, did you do the research component both years?

Yeah, I did the research component both years.

*Wow. Very Cool. And that was here at Michigan State.*

Yeah. My first.. my first.. um research project was in sociology. I did one with Dr. BROMIN on the relations ships between on campus relationships among white and black students. The foundation of it was *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria* by Beverly Tatum.

Uhhuh.

She's the president of a historical black college. A women's historical black college  
*But you were a English major? But you went to this sociology professor. Did you just like that professor? Did you know they had work?*

I was really interested in race relations. I wasn't sure how or in what context but I was dabbling around.

*So did McNair help you find this professor?*

No I took a class with him. I was just like I knew within the first week that I wanted him to be my mentor.

*Very cool*

Well I actually. It was between two professors. I ended up choosing him as opposed to the other professor. I had two in mind.

*So did you work with that other one the second year?*

No. The second year it was very closely connected to literature. I did Audre Lord's *A Woman Born* and Adrienne Rich's *Aimee*, It was a juxtaposition of the two texts. It was a close reading I looked at how they basically recreate themselves in this fictional biography context. Which I really enjoyed. And my old professor from the year prior came to my McNair reading. And he was like yeah, yeah, you sound a little bit more excited about this one.

*You think that was experience presenting? Or the content of the research?*

It was the content of the research. I think it was totally content. Cause I had a lot more fun with the second one. And that's why I redid McNair over again. Because I feel like my first experience wasn't the best. And so I did it a second time. That was my argument for doing it again.

*Why wasn't it the best that first time?*

Well, I.. Some personal things. Like I had just left Chris' dad.

*How old was Chris?*

Chris was—he had to have been about 4 months when I left. And we were living together. So it was kinda like basically like resituating not only my finances but like organizing my schedule and things of that sort. So I felt like to a certain extent some personal things had hindered that as well.

*Wow it's a lot to raise children and going to school. So you were a Junior when you had Chris?*

I was kinda half way. I was like 1 credit from being a junior.

*And how old were you?*

I was how old? 21? when I had Chris.

*And Chris is six?*

Chris will be five this year.

*Yeah. I have children who I raised during my undergrad.. I know its hard. I know it's hard.*

Once I got a system — everything worked out. I mean like after I really got a system, like a mental system..

*Did McNair have any kind of an... Like in my McNair we had a weekly counseling session. A weekly meeting with a... what was she called... a program counselor.*

Yeah we had those as well.

*Did you think that helped you find your system?*

Yeah and one of the things I wanted to share with you was that our program director was – I mean she was literally to a certain extent I was renegotiating if she should be Chris's god-mom because I can remember a day where um I had no money and I could not buy any diapers and this was like a situation where Chris' dad was you know he was pissed off because I left and so he was like kinda trying to punish me and so she came over to my dorm and we went shopping and she got him some diapers and I think she got him some other things. She would like take him on occasion take him to the mall with her. He was like "her little McNair baby" that's what she used to call him. "Oh my little McNair baby is here." That's what she used to call him.

*That was the program director?*

*Did you have that kind of relationship with the Program Counselor as well? Or was that different?*



See we had the director and the program staff member. But the director is the person you went to go see. She was actually the person who was counseling us as well. They actually had it where the director was doing some counseling and then there was other staff members who were doing some counseling as well and then we had instructors.

*Did you have like weekly meetings?*

Yes. Well we had weekly meetings but they were more so lectures where they would teach us research methodologies or we had workshops.

*What kind of workshops?*

I remember the **Writing Center** came in at one point and taught us talked about research methodologies and things of that sort just letting us know they were there for assistance. The other thing we had was um we had workshops on professionalism on the context of what to wear, what not to wear, how to present a resume how to put together business cards so when we went to conferences things of that sort.

Did you get to go to conferences as a McNair scholar?

Actually the year I went we went to a lot of conferences because it was an anniversary year

*So where did you go?*

We went to U of Iowa, we went to Ohio. I can't think of what the conferences were called.

*Were they for grad students or for undergrads?*

Undergrads?

*Any of them for grad students?*

One of ones I got to do was...

*Waitress- I ask for 10 minutes*

*Chris chokes on his water.*

*Ok State University has national graduate research week where its for grad students from across the country and then they invite McNair scholars as well.*

*Anything like that that you were invited to that you were involved with grad students?*

There were. No, none that I can think of. The was the ones that I went to was always undergrads. There were opportunities to do um Like you know how they send listserves like if you want to do research here but for the most part there were undergraduate conferences that we went to.

*Did you gain confidence presenting in front of an audiences in going through that experience?*

I had also prior to Like in high school I took public speaking so I kinda already had a context for public speaking.

*Some people get petrified in front of an audience. I get nervous. Everytime. No matter how many times I've done it. But I'm not scared to the point of being physically ill. And I've known people that say that it does to them. I think the more we practice, the easier it gets. But the butterflies don't' ever go away.*

That's the thing. I know a lot of times in my sort of reflection upon McNair a lot of the stuff we did was about appearances and public speaking. We went on a retreat to Shady Creek. One of the workshops was dedicated to public speaking. And they actually had us do improves where we had to like make up a speech in like 10 minutes then we had to go up in front of our peers.

*Oh wow. So you went to like camp?*

Well, they called it a retreat. It was really nice. We went to a golf and ski resort. But, none of us could golf. None of us could ski. So we were sort of like thinking.. why did they pick golfing and skiing. But I think to a certain extent it was to show us how a different culture. That's my context.

*Chris stop it.*

*Then move.*

*Do you have to take Chris to class with you?*

*Yeah, yeah I do.*

*Chris I do not like this.*

*Under the table. Now sit down.*

*Please sit down on your bottom.*

*Get up and sit down on your bottom*

*Play with your cars.*

*Your behavior now is unacceptable.*

*Mommy I don't want to.*

*You shouldn't be playing like it's a jungle gym down there.*

*Maybe we should think about pizza.*

*Mommy I didn't bring my cars.*

*What do you think about pizza. Do you need some pizza?*

*I'll just leave it rolling it says it will record for hours.*

*What do you think about pizza? Do you want some pizza?*

And the reason I think the retreat was to give an eye on a new culture is because none of us had ever been to a resort.

*So, what were the demographics of your McNair?*

The majority – minority students. There was always like 1 or 2 *white* students and in my opinion they sort of blended in. Well a lot of them. And then we had students that looked white but weren't white. Native American or Chicano

*I think one of the requirements is a 1<sup>st</sup> generation. So, you're a first generation college student. At least in my McNair. I don't know if that's national req. Fairly low income level, first generation. And I think often white students have had a way in to Higher Ed. But I don't know why the demographics are the way they are. I know that based on it being Ron Mc Nair..*

Yeah. Oh Yeah. That's true. You're right.

*He wanted underrepresented students into a PhD program. Do you plan.. You're working on your MA now?*

Yeah. I want to get my PhD.

*Do you know in what?*

I'm probably going to sorta try and figure out a program where I can like design my own course enrollment. Cause I know I want to focus on composition. Composition Cultural Identity and Lit. Cause even though like I have a English lit background. Even in this composition program I feel the desire to go back into close reading.

And then you can close read cultures and society as well as the Lit.

*V laughs.*

*Christopher what kind of pizza do you like?*

*What kind of pizza does Chris like?*

He'll eat just about anything. What were you thinking about agetting? Do you want to get a pizza and split it? Well, truthfully, I like their burgers here. But if you want a personal for Chris or you want to get one and split it.

I was thinking about doing the personal size of the vegetarian.

*Are you vegetarian?*

No. But the last week I've been overindulging on my eating. So I thought, OK.

*Time to*

*Me too. But I don't want to today. Maybe tomorrow.*

You raised your kids by yourself?

*Pretty much. The oldest was 6. We raised them together for 6 years. Then I raised them for 6. I'm thinking the oldest was 6. Yeah second grade. They were 6, 4, and 3 when we separated. So I did the next six years by myself he was in and out of the picture. Most every other weekend he'd take them and then there were weekends where something came up and maybe half the time he would pay child support. So.. Yeah. It's a crazy life to even try to do college I mean but then you throw in family and financial issues and all that stuff and it's just amazing we make it each day.*

That's true. And, you know what's crazy though is that I don't think I got it. When I say got it like found out how to maneuver until like my last year. The year I graduated. Because I ended up getting on the dean's list. Getting the best. I mean like when I started out as a freshman I had a great gpa, but that last year was awesome. It was like "I get this. I think I get it."

*Did you go straight into graduate school from your undergrad?*

I took a year off. I had planned on it. I only applied to 2 graduate schools and I didn't get accepted into those graduate schools so I took a year off. And I worked full time

*Then how many did you apply to the*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> time? Just one.

*Just one? And, you're here? (MSU). That's very cool.*

I knew where I was going after this. I knew I was done with corporate America. And I think I had to go back to school and I thought why not here? Because you know. My goal even as an undergrad was to get out of state. Even in the PhD. But I was like. He was young. I already had networks here.

*So location was a big factor.*

*Christopher in the background. I see you.*

*So my notes that I have with me today ask about the things we've been talking about. We kind of begin in your undergraduate degree and what you're majoring in what year it was what you're majoring in. How old you were... Before all that, had you thought about graduate school?*

Yeah. I used to work in the OSS with a program called SUPER. And SUPER was a program that transitioned high school students to undergrad. I was an office assistant for Betty. She was the director of SUPER

*Was that like a work-study?*

Yeah. It was a work-study. So like I was already situated as a leader to the high school students. And, within that same office was McNair/SROP. So, I knew about McNair/SROP for a while.

*So you knew you could apply to McNair?*

Yeah. I knew. Like especially when I changed my major to English Lit. Because I in my opinion figured that I wasn't going to make it to the point I wanted to make it with just an undergrad.

*What do you mean by “the point you wanted to make it?”*

Well I wanted to teach. And, I didn't want to teach high school students. Like I wanted to do research and I wanted to publish. *Christopher. No, you should move please. Thank You.* And I saw getting my PhD s the avenue for publications. I mean of course, I could have wrote my book in undergrad but I thought getting my phd..

*What kind of book?*

An autobiography.

*An autobiography. I'm intrigued.*

I want to do other research to but yeah,an autobiography for sure. I wanted people to read my life out loud. I know its cliché.

*No I think it's awesome. I have the same dream. – I was just talking to a friend the other day about all these side-jobs I take at the university. To make ends meet and be able to keep sending money home to the kids. And she said you need to quit doing that. I said what are you talking about? I need to make ends meet. She said you need to sit your butt down and WRITE. You write really well, and people like to read what cha right and she was just on me.. I stopped and I'm thinking, she's making sense here. Because you know if you're on the shelf with your autobiography I mean out side of academia.. if you're on the shelf of Barnes and Nobel– then you and Chris no more worries financially. I mean it's a long hard road academically. I mean we'll have a good job and we'll make a good salary and that job will last us our lives but that autobiography could change the world for you guys. ???? Um. Leonora knows of publishing academic work in non academic settings too. Which is something she went to a conference last year. I wrote that in my statement of purpose that I want to work with Leonora find avenues to publish academic work in non academic settings.*

I want to work with her too. I have to get my committee together so and she's definitely one of the people I'm thinking about.

*You haven't established a committee at all?*

No.

*It's time for that. So do you see Julie as an MA that hasn't established a committee yet? Is it Julie that talks about program things with you?*

Yeah. She's really good too.

*Do you keep in touch with either of your mentors? Either one of your research mentors?*

My last one I do. She. It's weird because um. And this is just me being honest even though I understand like it's just context. I'm a Christian and she's a lesbian and at first I was assort of troubling myself about working with her. You know because of . I know and I can't find the words to explain the sort of complexity within that but. She is just so smart. Like I admire her. I really admire her. She is yeah. She was my teacher twice. I took a class once and I was like OMG this lady is driving me crazy and I took it again and I was like yeah OK. Alright I think she's going to **help me grow as a writer**. And then I did McNair with her and I just saw another side of her. It was like she was giving me all her goods. It was like Oh My God!

*Do you still stay in touch?*

Yeah. We still stay in touch.

*By phone? By email?*

She's teaching but she just took a position as a director of something in the English department..

*Whereat?*



Here. So last time I emailed her was in August. She told me about her campus visit for that new job we got.

*Hil. I think we're ready to order. This man needs some pizza.*

*Pizza? Want cheese pizza? No? What do you want on it?*

*Umm.. Macaroni.*

*Do you wanna just get some macaroni? Do you guys have macaroni? I just wanted to do umm the personal vegetarian pizza.*

*Oh you are playing around. Oh baby. Stop.*

*No no no no no.*

*I will have the burger. I'll have no cheese. With lettuce tomato onion and mayo.*

*No don't take it away. I want it.*

*You're making a big mess.*

*Is that fresh onion or grilled onion?*

*Fresh. Is that with fries? I need coffee though- badly.*

*Can you take the water away? He's making a big mess.*

*Don't take it away. Don't take it away.*

*Do you guys want crayons? (????)*

*Mommy. I want my water baaaaack..*

*But you're making a mess.*

*Did you drink all your lemonade?*

*Oh yeah. Look what's on here.. What is on your cup? What do you see? I see a chicken. Are you a chicken?*

*Chris do you go to school? Do you like school? Do you have friends there?*

*Let me grab a napkin.*

*I want my water.*

*What did I say?*

*But I want my water.*

*What did I say? Why did I take it away?*

*Because I was playing with it. But I want my water back. No I want it back!*

*Ok. We'll take the crayons.*

*Oooh I like the faces. The eyes and the mouth and the hair..*

*Is Matt ok?*

*I don't know. He got penicillin. When did he call? He was having chills. He said Do you know anyone who can take me to the doctor? I'm like yeah I can take you and I can I don't know bring my antibacterial spray. The last thing I need is to get sick. But I picked him back up. I want my water.*

*Color your picture. And, when lunch comes we'll get more water.*

*So, I asked you the other day to think of a story. And I might want 2. Here's my prompt. I wanted you to tell me a specific story from your years in McNair. And you kinda touched on that with the retreat. Maybe you could tell me.. and maybe it's a really good memory and maybe it's a tension. But if you could tell me a story from.. Actually you gave me tidbits of a couple. You touched on one when the director and you went shopping. I think that's phenomenal. And while you are thinking I'm going to touch base on some of the things well, we had the weekly meetings and I'm guessing you had kind of the same thing. Where every other week we met to.. a "student group meeting" and maybe this Jill Fletcher person came to talk about writing CVs and the next one we'd meet... some of them were... did you get program booklets.*

I should have brought mine.

*I would love to take a look at it. If you could remember to lend it to me . That would be fabulous.*

*Was your program for one full year?*

Yes, but we could do... I did 2. I did a mentoring year where I worked with a professor and the 2<sup>nd</sup> year I did the research colloquium. But you could do 2 research components if you wanted but I thought man I don't know if I want to write 2 research papers back to back. I can't imagine what kinda... Well, there's some stress level that goes along with all that. What they taught to me was a good deal of time management. Because you had this symposium that you would give your research at but 2 weeks before that you to be working on your powerpoint and 2 weeks before that had to have your lit review done and two weeks before that you had to have your summary. So I learned to work backwards from deadlines from them really, really well. Cause that's what taught me ok here's what I have to have here. And that was really smart. Well here. Here is kinda the research timeline. (goes through program book.. ). Did you guys?...

We had stuff just like that.

*So they give you weekly meetings on how to dress and how to present did you also have meetings about visual aids?*

They actually gave us templates though. They emailed a template to us and said to play around with it.

*That's interesting though. So there wasn't a lot of freedom to it? Do you felt like they crimped your style?*

They were strict. They were really strict. It felt like we were in a camp. A boot camp. A boot camp. With the ultimate goal being? (30:30)

Being to produce a research paper and take your butt to grad school. I think the other context was to use the research paper to get into grad school. I honestly do see that being what I benefited from. That research paper I feel like in my application could have taken me. I don't know with uhh..

*Grab that cup first so you have something to put 'em in*

I think that research paper..

*Was it your writing sample when you applied to grad school?*

Yeah.

*Have you done anything on a comparable level that's as much work as that since you been in grad school?*

Not yet. I know when my thesis comes it'll be in that context but. I've never had anything that I've done so many revisions on either. I think I could I did make 10-12 revisions.

*Who would make suggestions?*

LaTavia would, the director cause I was going to her. I also had a graduate assistant that I would go to.

*So the graduate assistant was part of the staff at McNair?*

She was the assistant to my professor. She was actually under my professor. That's an interesting story that I'd love to talk to you about as well because she wasn't getting paid. She was Ellen's Research Assistant.

*Who's Ellen?*

That's my professor. My mentor, rather. Latavia was staff at McNair. And then Ellen is my professor I asked to mentor me through the program the second time. And

Lauren, Lauren I think was her name. She was Ellen's research assistant and so she was helping me as well and what happened was I guess there was a misunderstanding because you know professors get stipends as well. Professors who ask to assist McNair students. I think there might have been a conflict among payment of the research assistant because um the research assistant thought that McNair was paying her but in actuality according to Latavia the professor was supposed to take the money she was getting from McNair to pay the research assistant if she chose to use a research assistant And there was conflict with that which sort of put a hold on some things for a minute because the research assistant she was very helpful I think for the most part I think in the summertime because Ellen had left for study abroad because she stepped in and was helping me more than Ellen was. *So the research assistant never took that out on you that there was conflict?*

No, she discussed it with me. Which Latavia thought was unprofessional. Cause Latavia said that she shouldn't have discussed with you. She should have left that blind with you but she should have been discussing it with Latavia.

*The director?*

But yeah I remember at one of our research meetings she talked about it.

*Was it just the two of you meeting?*

Yeah it was just the two of us meeting.

*Did you all also have research meetings that where the group doing research had to meet?*

Yeah, those were called. We actually had classes. See I wish I had. I really need to bring my schedule because what happened was, we not only had mentor meetings with the staff of McNair we also had a class. A research methodologies class where we also went over our research together as a group. So if you were in liberal arts you actually had a class

that met every week with a professor then on top of that we had meetings with our mentors.

*So how many hours were you taking?*

Credit like class? I was taking 12.

*You were taking 12. And you were meeting all these times with McNair on top of that... and being a mother?*

So imagine my meltdowns.

*Did you have a few meltdowns?*

Oh yes I did. I had more than a few. Sometimes I look back and I think I think it all paid off though.

*I was gonna ask what's your dream but I think you kinda told me. You want to write and autobiography and you want to teach college.*

UmmmHmmm.

*How long have you known that?*

I've known that since I'd say since sophomore year in college. I started off as an undergraduate in nursing. Then I changed my major to lit. So I knew right then when I changed my major that I was going to get a PhD.

*Do you think that McNair is helping you to... is it a step stool or any kind of help at all toward reaching that dream?*

You know I do. I think that. Well, I know you talked about how they helped you to think about organization to reach your goals. I think what I learned from McNair was more about commitment. I had committed to a lot of things. In context let's see I had never committed. Like my second research paper is the best because I had committed. My

heart was in it and I had committed to getting it done. So I think that's what I learned.

And I think Latavia would not play around. She was very like ok you need to get this done and what are you doing to prepare to get this done.

*That's how LaWanda was with us.*

***3/28 :: Change in technique. I'm only typing responses by the interviewee. I'm omitting casual conversation which does not pertain to the question at hand or a like issue/idea within the scope of this interview... 37:21***

60-80 in my McNair.

We'd start off in January

Visiting scholars came in May.

Visiting scholars left in August.

30 or 40

I remember the summer I graduated in 2006, a couple staff members from McNair would come up to me and say did you do your survey? Did you complete your survey? Cause you know they have yearly surveys that alumni have to complete. They'd say you know you have to do that. I'd say yeah I know. The affirmative action thing had happened and they wanted to make sure they had funding. One during the first half and then the summer and then the final end survey. There was a lot of.. at first... I thought this stuff was so stupid. But I understand the context now that I'm a graduate student. We had to do progress reports [on ourselves]. On top of progress reports we had to do like a goal-setting personal statement. We had to do that at the beginning of McNair and then at the end of McNair. And it had to be like 3 to 4 pages long so a lot of people were whining about it. But it makes a lot of sense now. A lot of the work we have to do [in grad school] that we

don't' get credit for actually has a meaning to it. Cause as an undergrad you get into this theme of I'm writing this paper cause I need to get a grade. A lot of times we were just doing them [the McNair assignments] not necessarily thinking there's a meaning behind them.

When I say commitment, I think that in McNair you actually have a cohort as well. We have this like undefined connection. What I've also found out is there is an element of leadership that I see [in the people I was in McNair with] that have gone on to do other things, in other states, at other graduate schools.

***Lull. Lunch is served. (49:00)***

*Is it hard to make ends meet?*

Sometimes I think that if I had a support system back home that it wouldn't be as hard. When I graduated from college I was living—this is *so* awkward— but I was living with my ex's father until I could find a job. I was in [situations] where I haven't had a place to live. I just committed to working my butt off. I think that was the most struggling time—the year after I graduated. Cause you know, if you either don't have a job or have some kind of foundation right after you graduate. I don't know. I stayed with my grandmother when I was working until I could make a living. That will never happen again.

I have friends that will help me watch him [my son] once in awhile but that's it. They give good advice too.

It's weird though. I mean of course it can be hard with one, but *three*?

Being a single mom forced me to see that the work I've done forces me to see that I don't want any more kids.

At that age [when Chris as born] I was so selfish. I think I learned to sacrifice.



*Do you think motherhood makes you a different kind of student?*

Yeah it does. I used to work in the writing center and I was like the mother. The person people would go to for... some rational advice, some nurturing advice. I think I started to give more too. I don't know. I just got to the point where I felt like people were more important than superficial things.... Someone told me this when I was going into my masters program she said you're going to be just fine. I was like what do you mean? She said because you have a family. I was like what do you mean? She said as a single undergrad it was like I stressed out about stupid things. She was very stressed as opposed to a lot people in graduate school who have families she was like it's not the end of the world for them. Like for me, this is like all I have. I freak out a lot. She was like if you've got a family you have something to fall back on. I didn't understand where she was coming from but I was trying to catch on to what she was saying. But I think yeah, you're right. I don't think superficial things are the end all be all. In undergrad I always felt I had to choose between motherhood and my degree but there were times where I felt like they lived within themselves in harmony. I felt like I was a better student because I was a mother.

I think it [motherhood] allows me to understand my students a little bit more. As opposed to someone who doesn't have kids. I've always enjoyed talking to kids. I have a little bit more patience with them. I'm very forgiving....

*Code Switching?*

I used to think that identity was very soulful– that identity came from the soul. But then as I started reading more I started seeing that identity was a choice, it's a construction. And I think I learned that in the Masters Program that identity is a construction and so we choose in some context the ways in which we present ourselves.

*I don need a nap*

*I donwanna nap*

*Mommy.*

You ever heard of the movie Viva Sapata? It's about a warrior who's an outsider and he fights against the ... he ends up oppressing the very people he was initially trying to help.

*An an instructor sometimes I ask am I becoming the very thing I hate?*

I'm glad you talk about money in this thing because people don't talk about money as much as they should other than the context of you know the sort of popular culture money. But people don't talk about money in academics.

I remember I used to play. Growing up my grandmother raised me. We had roaches. We had roaches believe me. At night I used to play this game. It was like warfare against the roaches.

## **Sugar— an interview on McNair**

*How did you find the DRPW program at MSU for me?*

I think I was just looking. I'm one of those kind of people that when things come to mind, I just look for you. It was probably through some conversation we had and I was just looking and it was probably based on money and because you were wanted to go somewhere different. I'm just going by me and my personality so it's probably something you said. I'm looking for money and the best deal and the type of program you were wanting.

We was in the program [McNair] when it first got in 95; I always wanted to become an academic advisor so I went to school to do that and once I got my Masters I ended up on Student Support Services. And I always loved to do research I wanted to be a part of that. So, when opportunity opened up and when the person that was in this position left Lawanda gave me a call and asked me if I wanted to come over. Student Support was a great training background for me but the population of students was a little bit different than I wanted to work with students who they kind of know what they want to do and they just need help and the students before was kinda like chasing them down and saying you need to come see me. You need to come see me. It just got a little overwhelming at times. When I had a150 students I had to chase after so it got a little crazy and when it came up I jumped on it.

Currently we are serving 29. We were at 20 when you were in the program and now were up to 29. The dynamics have changed since you were in the program we now serve second semester sophomore students. (5:55)

And we're kind of weeding out the 1 year seniors because that's not long enough for them to be in the program. So we can give them all they need cause 1 year is not really long enough to get all the skills they need and then turn around and apply.

[McNair has been at WSU] Since 1995. I was in the first batch and I stayed two years. Not really [changed] maybe some of the approaches [have changed], how they do things, like the meetings. The faculty volunteers and getting those people has kinda changed over the years as people have begun to know what McNair is and what McNair does. The dynamics have changed because more people know about us and are willing to help as far as mentoring our students. I think we're a little more we have more things for our students. When you start a program growing you see what you need to do evolve and our students get more hands on experiences and more meetings to attend so they're exposed to a lot more than what I was exposed to. Specifically like the research. The student group meetings and the faculty led seminars. Since you've left we purchased a communication software called "Communication Fitness" for specifically our sophomores. They are getting their writing skills in tune before they start their research- before they start writing because a lot of our students were like "how do you do research?" "How do you write?" So we've put that in place this past year. We are now in a lab where students actually go into the lab and look at graduate programs and see what's out there and look at kinds of money. We have our handbook but now it's "get on the computer" and make them look. So that's what I'm talking about. [We are nurturing their computer skills as well as their writing skills].

I thought it was great when you came back. When we have our students help other students. Like you used to do the writing thing for us [how to write a cover letter]. –check cv as to which SGM I led!! We haven't had anybody like that since. But what we have done is we have our McNair scholars are tutoring other McNair Scholars. We have a couple creative writing majors in the program. We have a mentor who is going on maternity leave. And since she's [the creative writing major/McNair scholar] good at writing, she's helping another student who struggles with organization.

We're willing to pay them, they are tutoring for us. Which makes our lives easier. We don't have a tutoring staff on hand. So, this really helps us. Those upper level courses is really hard to find tutors for those sometimes. (student body of McN)

We have a lot of pscyh people just cause social science is big on campus. But this year we have– it's kind of really awesome– this year we have a more diverse group. We have a young man in physics and a he's an African American student. So that's a rare find. We have another young man who's in chemistry, organic. We have some in psych. We have two creative writing and one literature guy. We have 6 guys in the program. We've never had 6 guys in the program at one time. I don't know if it's this particular year or what. I'll know more when I look at the numbers.

60-% women nationally.

We have 6 guys. One's a return and the rest are new. We even have a business guy who wants a PhD in business and usually they don't. He wants to teach.

The numbers aren't big. That's the one thing. It's hard to get them [the PhDs]. Senioritis is a big culprit.

*Do you think that McNair demonstrates to us how grad school is?*

Yes. Especially relating to myself. Personally. It took that edge of unknown away.

[McNair] helped me with research. I knew how to do a lit review. It helped me with research. I knew how to do a lit review. I absolutely I knew what the process was to start my thesis. I was proactive that way cause I knew how to formulate and to narrow down my question. Those are the things I appreciate from McNair. Because when it actually came to writing, and to start the writing process I was comfortable enough where I could get started.

I have my Masters. I'm dying to get my PhD. It's just with family and things I'm trying to time it right. My husband is constantly pushing me we can do this we can do this. And, I'm constantly putting the brakes on. Like ok, retirement is around the corner. But, golly, I would love to be a professor; I love to do research. And I think the program keeps that in the forefront. I love being and school and writing and stuff.

17:54

Everybody runs their programs different but follows certain types of guidelines. It depends on your objectives in your proposal. That's the guiding thing.

Me personally I still have relationships that are still going on outside of McNair. I know when our students get in personal jams, financial jams and things I try to be an additional resource to them to help them work their way through it so they can feel comfortable coming to me "my lights are getting ready to cut off" and I can say "ok this is what we need to do" ... but that's just me my nature just to help. All students go through struggle in some form or fashion I try to be there for them. When we go to conferences we hang out, we have dinner, we fellowship together. That's just me personally I think.

Now, [Ingrid] and I go running together. We have a class together. So there's outside connections there.... We purposely took a class together. It's on the students, but we welcome it if that's the case. We still get emails when students get married and have babies.

We have the traditional student and we also have the non-traditional students who are single moms or married with kids. There's a balance.

We've not thought about or discussed [daycare]. We'd have to write that in to our proposal. We know if kids got to come then bring the kids.

*What do mothers do with children????... (23:17)*

We understand those things cause we as staff with children we run into the same problems. So we know that if you have to come and you have to bring someone I'm not going to say don't come. You do what you got to do. So we've always been open to that. We know why you can't come because the baby is sick. You're not going to get penalized for that. We find some other way for you to get the information. So, you're not penalized for that.

I was a single mom in McNair with 3 children. I lived that too.

I think that makes my job, not unique, but I been there. I was McNair. I've lived McNair. I've gone through all the crap that students can go through while in McNair. I've lived all that so I understand and I know and at the same time, I understand and I know, so I know there's a solution to something. We just gotta find it.

*Sugar, you need to know that it was my weekly meetings with you that were my cornerstone in me getting through my undergrad. You know I had no support in the English Department. I had no.. well I had my way of stress relief and I had my best friend but I had no family support network*

*or support network in my program. And it was those weekly meetings with you that made all the difference. I mean we get to the bottom of it, I didn't even have support from my research mentor. Do you retain research mentors?*

We listen to you guys. If the experience has been horrible and continuously, now it may be a one time deal where it's just personality clash. But for instance we have a particular person with every single person over a 4 5 6 year span that person has not provided, has dropped the ball, and we just can't count on them. So we will try to help students find someone else instead of this person. That's rare but it is the case. We listen to you guys. They're not meeting with me. I can't find them. They're not returning our emails. That's a mess. Why would we pair up a student so they have to go through that mess. A lot of times it's just personality and you guys don't click with them. But in this case we just won't let a student work with this person because they drop the ball every time.

I still stay in touch with my research mentor. I love her. She was my mentor before McNair. She was my mentor for 2 years while I was in the [McNair] program. Then when I went on to graduate school, she was who I bounced stuff off of, cried on her shoulder, then she was on my thesis committee. When I graduated she went on to, ... but we kept in contact. It is awesome.

I hear feedback from students when they go to conferences. They go golly, you really got us ready. Some of the stuff we've seen, they weren't even ready. They didn't practice. We get a lot of feedback especially from conferences about what to wear and how to say it and sometimes we think we're so hard on you guys but we want you guys to be the best at what you're doing. We want you prepared.



*How to dress.*

“Portraying a Professional Image” –by Connie Dietz

Alternatives to shopping at Talbots. Connie has changed her presentation. She now talks about hitting the sales at the right time when they have the mass sales and things are 70% off. And going to Penny’s and how to feel the fabric and she’s really gone out of her way to come down to.. she used to talk about Von Maur. She talks now about Target. She told the girls to watch the cut.

We usually have a guideline we follow. 1/3 must be first-generation low income. A lot of our students fall under both.

We fill 1/3 first generation limited income.

We have traditional students like 20 or 21. They won’t like what comes out of Talbots. She talks about that. Watch your hemlines; watch your bust lines.

You do want to invest in that 1 nice interview suit. She talks about slacks and nice khaki’s, a shirt and a tie. Guys can find stuff anywhere. Are there other tools to help bridge that low income to the academic class?

It’s exposure.

With the hard work especially in regards to getting the PhD. The students actually seeing people going through the process. A lot of the students coming back to share. I think the campus visits do wonderful. The conferences open their eyes to a whole new world of possibilities. I think it’s exposure.

Sometimes I have to pull them in my office and we have a conversation about how to speak to people. You can’t just go cussing somebody out because you’re mad. So talk

about those things. LaWanda will too. They want to succeed and they want to be ready so they tend listen so they tend to take the advice that's given them.

I believe in I only use email once someone established a relationship. If it's someone you have access too, you need to make an appointment and **go visit with them.**

*You said: exposure was the tool that helped bridge issues of class..*

*Repetition of exposure?*

I don't have to say much. I just let them go and observe and they see it for themselves. Wow I can't believe she did it. It's an awakening of what they do. And how we've grown them. They see other people's mistakes and they then learn from thtt. Exposure. Put 'em out in the in the world. Let them see other people's mistakes. They say wow. Ill make sure I wont' do that.

*Is it a form of imitation?*

They see \_ wow they did an awesome job. They see something great. They come back polishing. They want to emulate the way it's done. We try to get you guys prepared. We don't want to set you up to fail. We don't want you to be embarrassed. So we give you some tools. It's up to you to use them. **We'll tell you what not to wear but I guarantee you that someone's gone and taken a big risk and it's backfired. A plunging neckline with breasts floppin' out. Pulling down that skirt because it was too short. Sometimes they got to bust their own heads. We gave you to the tools its up to you whether you're going to use them or not.**

Note to self: is this an issue of class?

*Textual*

*Research.*

*Writing program for sophomores.*

### ***Visuals***

*(including mode of dress)*

*How we are perceived. Even because of how we dress*

That's one reason why its important to do mock presentations before we push you out there to do your very first. So you see, you get an idea of how its done, what is done, [for] when you get out there We help you with the PowerPoint. And now its even changed. We've loosened the reigns on the poster board. 'Member we used to use the trifold poster board? Nowadays, all these undergraduates are doing these elaborate, big beautiful posters. Our students are moving toward that. They are trying to get ready for conferences and their mentors are wanting students to that. We're being forced to have to accommodate that. We wanted you to understand the font size and understand the layout. And now there's software that can do that for you. It's a new tool. That students are going to have to learn.

You have to do both *[the powerpoint and the poster]*. Usually most conferences you do one or the other. But you're ready to go do both.

### ***Ethically based:***

Counseling is ethically-based in what we talk about and confidentiality. That's my background. That's LaWanda's background.

This is a safe haven for students in whatever situation they're dealing with....

The thing is, with this job, every year and every student, there's going to be new *something* that we have to address– and it's going to have to do with ethics.

It's private.

You come to me for an issue.

It's very private– and you need to be safe.

***What kind of an education is McNair?***

I strongly feel McNair is graduate school preparation. For when you *get* there you have a set of tools that you can rely on, you can use, you can go fall back on to help you get through the tough times in grad school. The unknowns of grad school. You know about a lot of the things that go on in grad school. You know about the application process. You know about the selection process. You know about money. About how to find money. Those kinds of things. That's the educational piece. You really know how to maneuver through. And, the first year is the toughest year. And if you have a skill base you're more likely to stick it out. You know how to look for people to get your needs met. Resources. **You know how to work your resources.**

It helps you get to know yourself. Your strengths, your weaknesses. How do you enhance the those, the ones that aren't as strong? What do you do? Ok. I know you I need a tutor. I know I need to do this. Time management.

I love this program. I say that because of what's it's done for me but [in that] I try to help students too.... How Lawanda and I are passionate about this program. And how we really, really want our folks here to succeed.

*I told Sugar: It's sure working [for me].*

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<sup>1</sup> Class

<sup>2</sup> A Rhetorical Education, Class, Motherhood, An Agent of Change

<sup>3</sup> An Agent of Change

<sup>4</sup> Class

<sup>5</sup> A Rhetorical Education, An Agent of Change

<sup>6</sup> Class

<sup>7</sup> A Rhetorical Education, Class

<sup>8</sup> Class, Motherhood

<sup>9</sup> A Rhetorical Education—The Progymnasmata

<sup>10</sup> Motherhood, A Rhetorical Education, An Agent of Change

<sup>11</sup> Class

<sup>12</sup> Motherhood

<sup>13</sup> Class, Agent of Change

<sup>14</sup> Class, Motherhood

<sup>15</sup> Motherhood

<sup>16</sup> A Rhetorical Education

<sup>17</sup> A Rhetorical Education

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- <sup>18</sup> A Rhetorical Education, Class  
<sup>19</sup> A Rhetorical Education—The Progymnasmata  
<sup>20</sup> A Rhetorical Education  
<sup>21</sup> A Rhetorical Education—The Progymnasmata  
<sup>22</sup> A Rhetorical Education—Reflection  
<sup>23</sup> A Rhetorical Education  
<sup>24</sup> A Rhetorical Education  
<sup>25</sup> A Rhetorical Education—The Progymnasmata  
<sup>26</sup> A Rhetorical Education  
<sup>27</sup> A Rhetorical Education—Reflection  
<sup>28</sup> Social aspects of McNair  
<sup>29</sup> Social aspects of McNair  
<sup>30</sup> A Rhetorical Education  
<sup>31</sup> A Rhetorical Education  
<sup>32</sup> A Rhetorical Education  
<sup>33</sup> Class, Motherhood, An Agent of Change  
<sup>34</sup> An Agent of Change  
<sup>35</sup> Agent of Change  
<sup>36</sup> An Agent of Change

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