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Wisconsin Liberal Arts Colleges' Collaborative Program Awarded \$1.1 Million Grant

Posted on: September 7th, 2012 by Rick Peterson

A highly successful and unique regional collaboration model between Lawrence University, Ripon College and St. Norbert College has been awarded a five-year, \$1.1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education TRIO to support the schools' Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program.

The grant will support the McNair Achievement Program beginning in the fall of 2013 and running through Spring 2018. The program focuses on preparing first-generation, low-income and racially underrepresented students for graduate school and the completion of doctorate degrees.



Nancy Wall

“The McNair program helps level the playing field for students from less privileged backgrounds by providing exposure to, experience with, and support for graduate school,” said Nancy Wall, associate professor of biology and Lawrence’s campus coordinator for the program. “I think this is incredibly important because these students bring important and valuable perspectives

that would not occur to students from more privileged backgrounds to the table.”

Dan Krhin, director of Student Support Services and McNair Scholars at Ripon, said the private liberal arts schools have a mission to educate everyone and the power of the consortium of the three schools makes it a stronger program.

“We are at a time in our country where we need more highly educated citizens, and we feel we are doing our part through the McNair Program to attain this goal,” said Krhin. “We have one of the more unique McNair models in the United States by combining three prestigious liberal arts institutions into one focused effort. All three schools contribute funding and institutional support to supplement the federal funding.”

The McNair Achievement Program currently is supported by a TRIO grant that runs through the 2012-13 academic year. According to Krhin, in the first four years of the current grant cycle, 40 students have been placed in graduate schools across the county, with 18 going directly into doctorate programs.

“The McNair Scholar’s Program has provided tangible support including financial aid for standardized testing and application fees, advice on the application and interviewing processes and preparatory guidance through my undergraduate education and research projects,” said 2009 Lawrence graduate Bryce Schuler, who is starting his fourth year as a combined Ph.D. and M.D. degree candidate at the Medical College and Graduate School of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

“Not only have I benefitted from being a part of the McNair Program as an undergraduate student,” Schuler added, “but I also have been able to provide insight and support to other McNair scholars as a graduate student. As our program continues to grow

and develop, these forms of assistance to McNair scholars will continue to increase.”



Alex Ajayi '12

New York City native Alex Ajayi, who graduated with a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Lawrence in 2012, says only now is he beginning to fully grasp the program’s “profound value.”

“Beyond the many instrumental resources it provides students to prepare them for postgraduate education, the thing that has stuck with me the most is the recurring narrative that students can circumvent the limitations of their background and aspire far beyond their frame of reference,” said Ajayi, currently in his first year of a Ph.D. program in counseling psychology at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. “For students like me, who don’t have the precedence of doctoral education in my family, this program was a beacon of what was possible.”

Kevin Quinn, who coordinates the McNair Program at St. Norbert College, calls it “a life-changing opportunity for the students in it.”

“They are provided with great mentoring, financial support and solid guidance toward successful graduate school applications.

Students entering the program not quite sure that they can measure up later find themselves opening up an acceptance letter from a grad program of their dreams.”