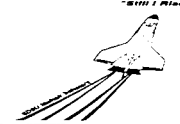


San Diego State University



McNair Memo



Issue Number 00068

Monthly

October and November 2000



Diana Verzi, SDSU McNair Scholar Program's first Ph.D. graduate

Hello Dr. Verzi

Below is an article written by Diana Verzi, our first Scholar to receive a Ph.D. Diana was one of the first cohort of SDSU McNair Scholars. Her determination to continue until she reached her goals is an inspiration to us all. Congratulations Dr. Verzi!

In 1991, I completed a teaching credential at San Diego State and became a high school math teacher. By the end of the year, I knew this was all a **big** mistake! While some folks are called to help teens through their difficult years, I had a love for math, which I wanted to share with them, but they were not ready to receive it. The McNair Program was in its infancy and looking for candidates to get under way, and I am not quite sure how they found me, but I will always be grateful that they did.

I wanted to do something besides teach high school, but I wasn't really sure what I should do. I scored well on the GRE's, but I applied for other jobs as well as for grad school. I was offered a teaching assistantship at Arizona State University (ASU) beginning in August 1993, and I also landed a new job to begin at about the same time. I quit teaching in June and said yes to both Arizona State and the new job. For the two-month interim, Barbara Huntington paired me with Mark Dunster of SDSU to work on a summer research project and I postponed deciding what to do next.

Well, I loved the research and in no time at all, my decision was made: I was going back to school. I paid my own tuition, but I received a stipend from ASU to teach one class of freshmen math per semester. The pace of graduate level math classes was a real shocker for me! I found myself teaching and attending classes all day, and staying up all night proving theorems and doing numerical simulations. When they give you your own key to the department be aware that they intend for you to be working 24 hours a day! It was exhausting and it took some real soul searching about priorities, but I loved it.

In addition to course work, I had to pass qualifying exams and

Please Mark Your Calendar

Dec. 7, 2000	Seminar, Graduate Panel
Dec. 9-16, 2000	Final Examinations
Dec. 11, 2000	Deadline, Mana Scholarship

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Jan. 2-22, 2001	Winter Session
Jan. 13, 2001	Martin Luther King Parade
Jan. 29, 2001	First Day of Classes
Jan. 31, 2001	Deadline, UNCF MERCK Scholarship
Feb. 1, 2001	Seminar, TBA

Please reserve the first Thursday of every month for McNair seminars.

complete a master's thesis. I used mathematics to simulate experiments being conducted in neuroscience and I attended conferences to show off my work. My advisor told me I should think about transferring to a school that did more applied math after the masters program, so I transferred to Claremont Graduate School in the summer of 1996 and moved myself to Los Angeles.

Claremont is a consortium of private schools and my support came in the form of free tuition and a small stipend to do some industrial research. It was not enough to live on, but I had a masters degree in hand, so I picked up extra money teaching at nearby community colleges. I took classes and worked on the industrial research during the day and ran the freeways at night to teach. There were more qualifying exams and there was a dissertation to prepare after I advanced to candidacy in 1998.

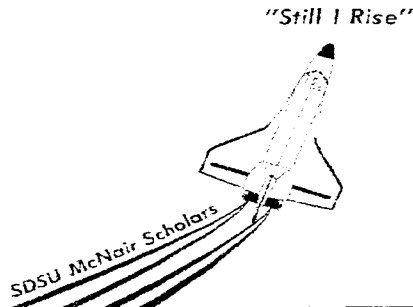
Who should I work with and what should I research for the dissertation? I still really loved neuroscience. I looked all over Claremont, and then all over Los Angeles, for an advisor who could help me extend my masters level work. I ended up getting permission from Claremont to continue to work under my masters thesis advisor at Arizona State. We telecommuted for one year and then I returned to Arizona for the last year to put it all together, teaching again at ASU to pay the bills.

I officially received my Ph.D. from Claremont Graduate School in August 2000 and now work as a post-doc at University of California, Davis, doing a little teaching and a lot of research. The road was long and sometimes the task looked completely out of my reach. It took seven years of my life and going into some degree of debt, but I do not regret one moment. I have a new respect for myself and others actual pay attention to me when I talk. I love being called "Dr. Verzi." I get paid to think deeply about mathematics and how it relates to real world problems in biology, physics and engineering; I get to work with experimenters and theoretical scientists, and I finally get to share my math with students who are ready to receive it.

12/15/00

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Develop Your 2000/2001 Calendar

Begin to prepare yourself for the upcoming year. Develop your calendar including such items as a draft of your statement of purpose, update your CV and web page, search of graduate schools and fellowships including deadlines, GRE and subject test dates, honor societies deadlines, and begin to ask for letters of recommendation. This list is not totally inclusive of the items you should have on your calendar. Make an appointment with Veronica to ensure your calendar has notations for your specific needs.

GRE Word of the Month

Pandemic *adj* (pan DEM ik) Prevalent throughout a large area

The Black Plague was virtually *pandemic* throughout Europe during the fourteenth century.

Cheating was *pandemic* on the campus of the military academy; cadets were carrying more crib sheets than books.

This word can also be a noun. A *pandemic* is an *epidemic* (ep i DEM ik) on a larger scale. The shortage of vaccine turned the winter flu *epidemic* into a *pandemic*.

Like the Latin "omni," the Greek prefix "pan" means all. A *panacea* (pan uh SEE uh) is a cure for all ills. A *panoramic* (pah uh RAM ik) view is one that seems to surround you. The *Pan-American* Games are open to contestants from throughout the Western Hemisphere.

A closely related word is *endemic* (en DEM ik), which means peculiar to a particular place or people.

Beware The Dream Stealers!

—Summarized from a keynote speech by Carl McNair, Jr. at the 1998 Pennsylvania State University McNair Research Symposium in August 1998

One of the highlights of the 1998 Penn State Conference was hearing the keynote speech given by Carl McNair, Jr., brother of Dr. Ronald E. McNair. Carl McNair, Jr. said that his brother, Dr. Ronald E. McNair, often told students, "Whether you reach your goals in life depends entirely on how well you prepare for them and how badly you want them." Carl McNair went on to say that as a McNair scholar, you have a dream for your future that will require a tremendous amount of effort and focus. As you work toward that dream, keep a sharp lookout for "dream stealers". You know who they are: those people that try to talk you out of your dream or act to prevent you from realizing it. They say they have your best interests in mind when they tell you why you can't or shouldn't do something. They're most likely to be found among those closest to you. You'll see them when you're with your family, when you spend time with friends, or while you interact with co-workers. Keep away from these negative people. Instead, surround yourself with those that will support you. But there is another dream stealer out there who is the worst of all: the one you see every morning staring back at you from your mirror. Keep this one at bay by daily reminders of the ultimate reasons you have the dream and the progress you've made toward it. Don't undermine yourself; you'll need all the support you can get. No matter what others say you are the one who ultimately determines whether or not you fulfill your dream.

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Success

for the striver washes away the effort of striving.

Pindar, *Odes* (5th C. B.C.), Olympia 2, TR. Richmond Lattimore

The secret of success is constancy to purpose.

Benjamin Disraeli. Speech, June 24, 1870