

UNH Receives Nearly \$1 Million for Student Grants

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DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire's program to help disadvantaged and underrepresented students prepare for graduate education recently got a boost from the U.S. Department of Education to the tune of nearly \$1 million over the next four years.

The McNair Graduate Opportunity Program is the recipient of \$226,661 per year in federal funding over the next four years to increase graduate education opportunities for disadvantaged and underrepresented students.

According to Meredith Maust, coordinator of the program, this is a 4 percent increase over the last funding cycle. She adds U.S. Sen. Judd Gregg and U.S. Senator Bob Smith were instrumental in securing the funding for the program, which was established nationally more than a decade ago in memory of Astronaut Ronald E. McNair, who died in the Challenger explosion in 1986. At UNH, the project has been in operation since 1992. The director is Joanne Curran-Celentano, associate professor of animal and nutritional sciences.

The funds will be used to prepare low-income and first-generation college students who have demonstrated strong academic potential for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities.

"This is an important program to have on our campus," said UNH President Joan Leitzel, "and I am delighted we have received continued funding to help disadvantaged and underrepresented students who perform impressively in our classrooms and laboratories. This allows them to pursue a graduate education and work with some of the finest faculty in the field."

College juniors from New Hampshire, New England and around the country participate in the summer residential research and graduate school preparation experience, Maust explains. Each McNair Fellow is paired with a faculty mentor who shares his or her research interests.

During the summer session, fellows work with their mentor to design, conduct and present a research project. In addition, they learn to identify appropriate graduate schools and how to negotiate the graduate school application process, including how to obtain financial support for their education. At the same time, Maust adds, McNair Fellows deepen their knowledge of research problems and methodologies in their field of study, develop their writing and presentation skills, and build their career goals through a series of workshops and seminars.

Over the past eight years, 124 low-income, first-generation and underrepresented individuals have participated in UNH's McNair Graduate Opportunity Program. To date, 64 percent of the graduating students have been admitted to, are enrolled in, or have completed a graduate program.

"The success of our students is incredible," Maust says. She cites two of the very first participants in the UNH program in 1992: Melissa Bourque received her doctorate in microbiology from Allegheny University and is now an assistant professor of microbiology at Defiance College in Ohio. Karen LaCourse received her doctorate in physiology from the University of Michigan and is currently employed with Parke-Davis in California.

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