



Bruno Baltodano

McNair Scholar Graduate

I resisted the idea of submitting my story for inclusion to the Washington State Trio Factbook, largely because I am the quintessential example of what NOT to do: I dropped out of college in my junior year, got a job, got married and started a family and had no inspirations to go back to college for 10 years. When I did go back, I completed a bachelor's degree, a master's and a Ph.D. while working full time and raising four kids with my wife. Take my word for it, this is NOT the way to do it. But, perhaps there is a lesson to be learned from my experience...

I am the first in my family to graduate from college. But I was not the first in my family to GO to college; three of my cousins started but did not finish their degrees. I am the first in my family to go to graduate school and the first to earn a graduate degree. In some ways one can say that I am a trailblazer, but that would be a misnomer because the road to completing an undergraduate and two graduate degrees was not a road that I walked alone. The support and tangible resources from the Ronald McNair program provided me a pair of sturdy boots to begin the long walk ahead. Without those "boots" I would not have succeeded in my dream of earning a Ph.D.

I can say this with full certainty because my bachelor's degree took two tries and 16 years to complete. By the spring semester of my junior year in college it was clear that I was struggling, so much that, when I tried to register for the 2nd time for his class, a psychology professor at Florida International University told me not to bother because I was one of those people that were "not meant to go to college." I followed his advice and worked full time for 10 years before going back to school in Washington – I never quite believed him to be honest.

When I went back to college surely I had the good fortune of meeting with Kerensa Allison, a McNair scholar herself. I will never forget it, I sat in her office and she asked me, "What do you wanna do?" When I answered, "Get a Ph.D." she did not even blink, she simply said, "Okay, let's figure out how to get you there." To me, that was the most important gift I received along this road less traveled, the full support of a community of people who not only know how to navigate the road (something no one in my family could do for me) but who firmly believed that I was not only "meant to go to college" but also meant to excel as an academic.

Today I am full professor, have conducted field research and have multiple publications. I still tell my students that I am the best example of what NOT to do, but I do so with the benefit of having a Ph. D. attached to my name and with the support of a vast network of individuals and institutions that walked besides me along that road.

Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Program

Through a grant competition, funds are awarded to institutions of higher education to prepare eligible participants for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities. Participants are from disadvantaged backgrounds and have demonstrated strong academic potential. Institutions work closely with participants as they complete their undergraduate requirements. Institutions encourage participants to enroll in graduate programs and then track their progress through to the successful completion of advanced degrees. The goal is to increase the attainment of Ph.D. degrees by students from underrepresented segments of society.

All McNair projects must provide the following activities: opportunities for research or other scholarly activities; summer internships; seminars and other educational activities designed to prepare students for doctoral study; tutoring; academic counseling; and activities designed to assist students participating in the project in securing admission to and financial assistance for enrollment in graduate programs. McNair projects may also provide the following additional activities: education or counseling services designed to improve financial and economic literacy of students; mentoring programs involving faculty members at institutions of higher education or students, or any combination of such persons; and exposure to cultural events and academic programs not usually available to disadvantaged students.

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