



# McNair Spotlight

Fall 2008

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## Conferences, Conferences, Conferences!

One of the benefits of participation in the McNair Scholars Program for students in good standing is the opportunity to apply for travel funds for conference travel or site visits to graduate schools. The following list shows conference presentation opportunities our scholars have experienced within the past six months alone.



Fellow	Major	Conference	Location	Presentation Type
Tyler Aten	Biology	Penn State / McNair	State College, PA	Oral
Atem Deng	Social Work	Penn State / McNair	State College, PA	Oral
Bridget Kreger	Medical Lab Science	Penn State / McNair	State College, PA	Oral
Bridget Kreger	Medical Lab Science	SACNAS	Salt Lake City, UT	Poster
Daniel Lim	Integrated Natural Resources	Annual CFERP Conference	Craftsbury Commons, VT	Poster
Benjamin Nsiah	Environmental Studies	Penn State / McNair	State College, PA	Poster
Sarah Roberts	Psychology	Penn State / McNair	State College, PA	Oral
Satish Serchan	Environmental Science	Baltimore Ecosystems Study	Baltimore, MD	Poster
Maxwell Ukegbu	Economics	Penn State / McNair	State College, PA	Oral
Ana Vargas	Medical Lab Sciences	Penn State / McNair	State College, PA	Oral
Jiaxin "J" Yu	Environmental Studies	Penn State / McNair	State College, PA	Oral
Jiaxin "J" Yu	Environmental Studies	SACNAS	Salt Lake City, UT	Poster

## Scholar Report: Satish Serchan

During the summer of 2008 I spent several months working as an Urban Resources Initiative (URI) intern at the Parks and People Foundation in Baltimore, Maryland. I was a research assistant for assistant director Dr. Mary Washington and assisted her with the Baltimore City Neighborhood Greening and Community Garden Census Database Project. She started the project after asking two simple questions: "How many green spaces have been created?" and "Where are they?"



Photo caption: As a 2007 McNair Summer Scholar, Satish gained valuable research experience working with mentor Breck Bowden, PhD, of the UVM Rubenstein School.

(Report continues on reverse)

## Scholar Report from Satish Serchan continued:

The lack of comprehensive listings of green spaces in Baltimore caught her attention and sparked an idea of pioneering a green spaces census project in the whole city to capture the number and whereabouts of green spaces and to allow a comprehensive approach to green space management: who stewards the property, how it is handled administratively, its organizational ties, and its legal status. My involvement with the Parks and People Foundation began on June 1 with a brief safety awareness orientation at the University of Maryland - Baltimore County (UMBC) led by Paul Harris of Collective Cry. This was an ice-breaker among new interns for the Baltimore Ecosystem Studies (BES) and the Parks and People Foundation. In addition, the commissioner of the Baltimore City Police Department helped with orientation to Baltimore and provided suggestions on standard operating procedures to be followed while conducting surveys. This was very helpful as I had never done anything like this before.

The Greening Census Project builds on an initial survey of community green spaces prepared by the Parks and People Foundation in 2002, which produced a geo-coded database and a series of reports relating to vacant lot restoration, community-managed open space, and greening strategies in Baltimore. While the survey produced a useful map of community greening projects, it was not designed or maintained as a comprehensive census of open space, community gardens, and greening projects. Several meetings defined project goals and objectives and guided the research into the number, types, ecological services, and geographic distribution of greening projects in Baltimore City.

Seeking this information formed the backbone of my research, and I was joined by Celine Manekin, a summer intern from the University of Maryland College Park. We designed a Microsoft Access database to hold the comprehensive information about the green spaces and the results of a survey questionnaire, and we planned and executed the survey and site assessment. We formulated standard operating procedures for our work, which included three steps:

1. Phone surveys to find out the status of existing greening projects from 2002 surveys
2. A visited to each site to document current conditions
3. Enter the information into the database

To carry out this work efficiently, we used existing GIS layers of pocket parks in Baltimore City and divided those GIS-layers into quadrants in order to simplify our site assessment field work. Celine and I launched into phone calls, site visits and conversations with folks from many different communities who were actively maintaining green spaces. We also took photos to document the site conditions. Thank goodness for NR 143! Slicing and dicing the GIS layers to create the survey areas could have been totally haphazard, but I used two important factors:

1. Density of gardens within certain sections of the city and
2. Accessibility of sections by vehicle to make these smaller sections more practical for field work

It was a great summer experience. I worked in an urban environment and learned a great deal about community organizing. I saw how interagency cooperation worked to build community social capital. I moved from problem formulation to product generation, reminding me of NR 206. Getting involved in a project that involved community participation was enlightening because my background prior to this internship and throughout my school years had been natural science-based internships. The project involved elements of participation at organization, community, and individual levels. I learned computational skills, completed administrative work, and did community outreach. On October 15, 2008 I presented a poster at the BES Annual meeting held at UMBC and participated in a community greening celebration where I presented results from the summer and highlighted importance of this project.

*URI is a partnership of the Parks & People Foundation, Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks, Baltimore Ecosystem Study, USDA- Forest Service and several academic institutions. Parks and People Foundation is a non-profit community oriented organization that strives to improve the quality of life for all people in the Baltimore area through educational and recreational programs that motivate young people and through partnerships that create and sustain green spaces within Baltimore city. Baltimore Green Space, founded in 2007, works to protect community gardens, pocket parks, and other open spaces created and cared for by city residents. The Parks & People Foundation's Community Greening Stewardship Program supports the planning, surveying, organizing, funding and implementation of neighborhood and park-based greening projects in partnership with city residents' agencies, community associations, and other private and nonprofit groups.*

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## Scholar Updates: Where Are They Now?

Jennifer Abustan, 2007 Cohort – University of Vermont Psychiatric Nursing Program  
Daniel Aguek, 2005 Cohort – Employed as an Admissions Asst Director, University of Vermont  
John Austin, 2006 Cohort - Champlain College MBA Program  
Abraham Awolich, 2005 Cohort – Syracuse University, Maxwell School of Government  
Bior Kuer Bior, 2005 Cohort – University of Vermont PhD Program in Biology & NEAGEP Fellow  
Katie Buss, 2004 Cohort - Colorado State University combined DVM / PhD Program in Animal Sciences  
Rajesh Khemraj, 2004 Cohort – Iona College MS Program in Business & Information Technology  
Dominick Lemas , 2004 Cohort – University of Alaska Fairbanks PHD Program in Cell & Molecular Biology  
David Lucero, 2006 Cohort – University of Vermont PhD Program in Biology & NEAGEP Fellow  
Mellisa Ly, 2005 Cohort - Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute PhD Program in Chemistry  
Gabriel Mabil, 2006 Cohort - Employed at the VT Refugee Resettlement Program, preparing to apply to graduate school  
Samantha Munro, 2005 Cohort - University of Pennsylvania Law & PhD Program in Philosophy  
Desmond Ndzi, 2004 Cohort - Employed as a mechanical engineer at Sikorsky Aircraft, Stratford, CT  
Johanne Osias, 2004 Cohort - Saint Michael's College Masters Program in Clinical Psychology  
Kesha Ram, 2006 Cohort – Employed as a Preschool teacher & recently elected to VT State Legislature  
Heather Taylor, 2005 Cohort - University of California Santa Cruz PhD Program in Computer Engineering

