

THE PHASE

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The Our Lady of the Lake University McNair Scholars Program Newsletter



Bianca Vasquez, Ph.D.



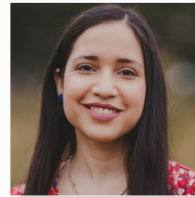
Joseph Zaragoza, Ph.D.



Cassie Cortez, Aud.D.



Marlene Cano, MD, Ph.D.



Julieta Rubio Hobbs, Ph.D.



Kevin Rodriguez, Ph.D.



James Hernandez, Ph.D.



Eden Robles, Ph.D.



Jeannine Tamez, Ph.D.



Kevin Meraz, Ph.D.



Lori Rodriguez, Ph.D.



Sandra Alcala, Ph.D.



Ramiro Ramirez, Ph.D.



Elaine Peña, Ph.D.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

By: Director Dr. Jessica M. Quintero

Hello Scholars,

As many of you may know, higher education, specifically grant funded programs like ours are at risk of losing funding critical to our existence. It has been heartening that many of our alumni and family of current scholars have so swiftly provided their support by sending testimonials, signing petitions, and contacting their local representatives asking them to continue the funding for TRIO.

I encourage those interested in contributing to the advocacy efforts to visit the [Council for Opportunity in Education](#) website to learn more.

It is important to note that bipartisan support does exist and we remain committed and diligent to servicing students who are first in their family to pursue advanced degrees.

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SCHOLAR NEWS

SRI25 Highlights

UTSA BOOTCAMP



SRI25 kicked off the summer by participating at the 11th Annual 2025 UTSA Grad School Boot Camp! Boot Camp was held for three days at both the UTSA Downtown & Main Campus with more than 175 participants from universities and colleges from across the country! Scholars accessed the necessary tools and resources to help them navigate their graduate school application process. They also engaged with nationwide graduate school admission teams, and participated in professional development sessions such as effective networking, graduate school wellness, graduate school application, and a graduate school panel.

Baylor University McNair Scholars Research Conference



Throughout the summer, scholars developed their research question, collected research data, and worked diligently with their faculty mentors to present their work at the 2025 Baylor McNair Research Conference! Scholars were given the opportunity to showcase their research in either a poster or oral presentation- and excelled! A huge congratulations to all the scholars whose hard work, perseverance, professionalism, and determination embodied the mission and spirit of the McNair Scholars Program!

SCHOLAR NEWS

Research



Isabella Arroyo
Biology

compare the amplification success of short and long fragments. Findings from this research aim to identify which tissues yield more reliable DNA over time, providing insights for forensic casework.

DNA Quality and Preservation in Muscle Tissue and Keratinized Tissue

Research Summary: DNA is a key forensic tool that can identify individuals from biological evidence such as hair, nails, bodily fluids, and skin. In cold cases, where remains are left unexamined for years, decomposition can degrade DNA and impact its reliability. This study investigates DNA preservation in two tissue types—muscle and keratinized tissue (hair and nails)—throughout different decomposition stages. Samples will be collected from controlled environments, with DNA extracted at set time intervals. Both mitochondrial and nuclear DNA will be analyzed using PCR to



Ava Lyn Caballero
Communication Sciences and Disorders

Canine Companionship: Reducing Anxiety and Promoting Communication in Speech Therapy

This study examines the impacts of therapy dogs on students undergoing speech therapy. Specifically, I aim to investigate whether the presence of a dog influences students, comfort levels, anxiety, fear, or relaxation during speech therapy sessions. The goal is to determine if having dogs present can create a more supportive and engaging environment that encourages communication and learning. I will assess if dogs may promote language development, improve articulation, boost confidence, and bring overall progress in patience. By analyzing the interactions between patients and dogs, I

hope to highlight the potential benefits of animal assisted therapy in speech therapy. This research could provide valuable insight into new therapy approaches and can highlight how the inclusion of dogs can enhance the effectiveness of speech therapy and patient experiences.



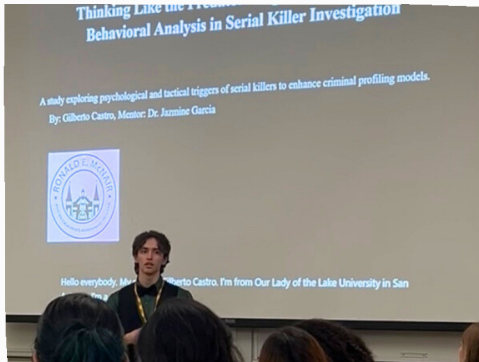
Darianna Carrillo
Psychology Concentration: Pre-Counseling
Minor: Child Studies

Balancing Dreams: The Struggles of Latinx University Students

This study explores the relationship between family expectations and academic outcomes among Latinx female university students, ages 18 to 24. Influenced by traditional gender roles like machismo and marianismo, many of these women face cultural and familial pressures that impact their self-esteem, identity, and academic success. While some struggle with meeting family expectations, others aim to break generational cycles and pursue personal goals. Using the Familismo Scale, this research will examine how family dynamics influence academic performance and psychological well-being.

SCHOLAR NEWS

Research



Gilberto Castro Jr.
Psychology & Criminal Justice

strategic tools for profiling and intervention.

Thinking Like the Predator: Cognitive Profiling and Behavioral Analysis in Serial Killer Investigation

This study examines whether adopting the mindset of a serial killer—analyzing their motivations, behavioral patterns, and tactical decisions—can enhance law enforcement's ability to apprehend them. It will introduce the Serial Killer Operational Layout, a framework dividing their progression into six distinct phases: Fantasy, First Kill, Preparation, Execution, Evasion, and Reflection. The research will also propose new classification systems—an Umbrella of serial killer subtypes—to better differentiate offenders based on attributes like intelligence, control, gratification type, etc. The aim is to provide,



Katrina Dunakin
Social Work

before getting to practicum could be a good indicator of why they may not pursue their MSW or why they end up eventually leaving the profession.

Self-care and Burnout Education in Social Work Curriculum

This study explores whether Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programs are preparing Social Work students to practice self-care to prevent burnout during field practicum. The study will be mixed methods, with the quantitative survey being the existing Student Maslach Burnout Inventory, with 50 participants analyzed for consistency using Qualtrics. The qualitative interview will consist of semi-structured questions that will be thematically analyzed using InVivo with 12-15 participants. Participants will consist of BSW students who have completed at least one semester of field practicum in the past year.

This is important because knowing if students are feeling burnt out



Gabriela Guadarrama
Education & Bilingual Certification

and the formative journey of becoming a bilingual teacher in today's educational landscape.

Voices of Aspiring Bilingual Educators: Lived Experiences within the Bilingual Education Student Organization

This study explores the lived experiences of future bilingual teachers as they engage in academic and professional development through a bilingual education student organization. Using a phenomenology lens and a case study design, the research seeks to understand how these students perceive and make meaning of their growth within this context. The goal is to examine how involvement in such an organization contributes to the shaping of their identities, values, and readiness as bilingual educators. This introduction lays the foundation for a deeper conversation around community, cultural affirmation,

SCHOLAR NEWS

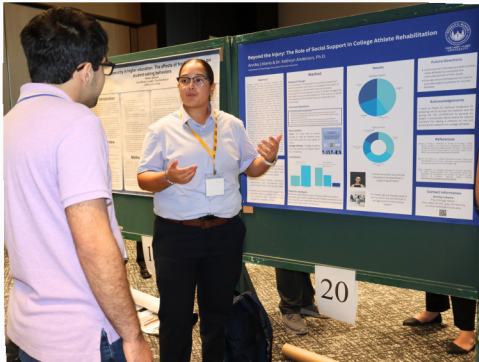
Research



Khristian Harden
Psychology

Self-Esteem. It's in my Genes

This study examines the importance of self-esteem development with specific attention to first-generation and continuing generation college students, and the differences in self-esteem between these groups here at Our Lady of the Lake University. My current case study will be using the qualitative approach to collect data through surveys with follow-ups and interviews. With my research I aimed to fully understand and interpret self-esteem and how it is connected to more moving factors than we'd like to admit. We will be moving on to the makeup of my research, which is the different points of literature that I have been able to collect to either back my statements or give reasons to why they should be questioned.



Annika Litterio
Psychology

The Mental Effects of Injury on College Athletics

This study examines how injury can affect a college athlete's mental health. I plan to research how social support impacts an athlete and how they return to play. I plan on interviewing a minimum of six athletes that play at the collegiate level, to be able to identify how their mental challenges impacted their recovery. They must be between the ages of 18-26 years old, with an injury lasting one week up to a year. I hope my presentation helps benefit college athletes' mental health services as well as informing spectators on a different point of view of what athletes are going through.



Valeria Peña
Business Administration Marketing

Harnessing AI for Marketing Insights: A Mixed-Methods Approach to Predictive Accuracy and Language Analysis

This research investigates how artificial intelligence (AI) predicts marketing trends and generates effective content. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study evaluates the accuracy of AI-generated predictions against real-world outcomes and analyzes the thematic and tonal elements of AI marketing language. Quantitative methods, including statistical modeling through Python and R., are employed alongside qualitative analyses via natural language processing (NLP) tools. By assessing the strengths and limitations of AI in marketing, this research aims to enhance the understanding of AI's impact on consumer behavior and provide insights for developing more effective marketing strategies.

SCHOLAR NEWS

Research



Charlyne Reyes
Psychology Concentration: Pre Counseling
& Criminology

Difficulties Latinos Face When Entering College and University

This study explores the struggles Latinos face when entering college and university especially when traveling away to earn their degrees. Latinos face challenges with financial aid, both from the state and universities, and their mental health. It focuses on the age group of students 18-25 that have been in higher education for at least 2 semesters. I will conduct surveys and interviews to determine the exact struggles Latinos face in recent years in hopes to gain information on how universities can help them succeed and complete their degrees.



Briana Rodriguez
Psychology Concentration: Pre-Counseling

Divorced Parents' Impact on Latinx First Generation Female Students

This quantitative research aims to address if having divorced parents impact Latinx first generation female students' self-efficacy and resilience throughout college. The collection of this data will be done through surveys using the Connor-Davidson Resilience scale as well as the General Self Efficacy scale to determine the student's ability to bounce back and overcome difficult challenges in life that are presented due to divorce. The students will be Latinx female students between the age of 18-25 that are enrolled in a four-year university, by keeping this open to individuals who do not have divorced parents it brings in a comparative group that will be used to determine if it does have an impact or not.



Kevin Rubio-Lobaton
Business Finance

How Do Business Leaders Perceive the Impact of AI on Decision-Making and Operational Efficiency?

This qualitative study explores how business leaders perceive the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in strategic decision-making and operational workflows. Focusing on the case of Computer Solutions, founded by Carolyn Labatt, the research examines how AI tools enhance efficiency, drive innovation, and inform business strategies. The study also investigates ethical concerns such as data bias, fairness, and transparency, identifying barriers to trustworthy AI adoption. Insights from participant interviews highlight the need for responsible, human-centered AI integration. Findings will benefit

both academic and business communities by offering practical strategies for using AI effectively while maintaining ethical standards in real-world business settings.

SCHOLAR NEWS

Research



Alessandra Oroscio
Communication Sciences & Disorders

Exploring Teacher Perceptions of Students Receiving Speech Services in Rural, Low-Socioeconomic School Districts

The qualitative study investigates how K-5 teachers in rural, low-socioeconomic school districts perceive and address the educational and developmental needs of students receiving speech-language services. Through semi-structured interviews with 3-5 educators, the research aims to highlight teacher insights, challenges, and strategies used in supporting these students.



Princess Pompa
Criminology & Political Science

Declining Democracy within the United States

This study examines the resilience of U.S. democracy from the mid-1990s to 2025 using a dual stress test approach—one at the national level and another focusing on state governance. By evaluating shifts in democratic practices over time, this research aims to identify both public and institutional factors that contribute to democratic erosion. Through this analysis, the study seeks to define safeguards that can protect established democracies from decline. This work contributes to the broader conversation about how established democratic nations can gradually backslide from their original values and practices, offering insights into reversing these trends to preserve democratic integrity.



SCHOLAR NEWS

Charla con Chávez



The “Charla con Chávez Podcast” is the official Our Lady of the Lake University podcast hosted by President Dr. Abel Antonio Chávez. This platform features OLLU students from an array of degree disciplines along with their remarkable journeys, community contributions, and personal and professional growth in higher education. Since its inaugural episode in December 2024, five McNair Scholars have been interviewed, showcasing their meaningful contributions to scholarly research. Find it on YouTube here: <https://youtu.be/loiPxGaA178?si=jK-OaN5FEqqJAxk>



Episode 1: Featuring Nemesis Crociata

The first episode of “Charla con Chávez Podcast” features Nemesis Crociata, B.A. in Social Work. In this episode, Nemesis shared insight to who she is, where she is from, and how her personal experiences have shaped her evolving interests and research.



Episode 2: Featuring Gilberto Castro Jr.

The second episode of “Charla con Chávez Podcast” features current McNair Scholar, Gilberto Castro Jr. In this episode, Gilberto speaks upon his aspirations of joining the FBI or CIA, along with his ambitious educational goals along with what drives his passion for excellence.



Episode 5: Featuring Steven Engbrecht, “Social Justice Warrior”

The fifth episode of “Charla con Chávez Podcast” features current McNair Scholar, Steven Engbrecht. In this episode, Steven highlights the importance of his research in social history with a focus on marginalized groups in San Antonio.

SCHOLAR NEWS

Charla con Chávez



Episode 12 Research, Leadership, & Breaking Barriers: Featuring Alexis Moreno

Episode 12 of “Charla con Chávez Podcast” features Alexis Moreno, BA in Psychology Pre-Counseling & Criminal Justice/Criminology. In this episode, Alexis shares her family connection to OLLU, and how her journey led her to her research titled, “The Effect of Administrative Segregation on Prisoners’ Mental health in Texas.”



Episode 17 Legacy, Leadership, & Lifelong Learning: Featuring Adriana Guerrero

Episode 17 of “Charla con Chávez Podcast” features current McNair Scholar, Adriana Guerrero. Adriana speaks on how she navigates unfamiliar spaces as a first-generation STEM college student in addition to how the McNair program has provided her with opportunities to present her research at a national level.

TRIO
RONALD E. MCNAIR
POST-BACCALAUREATE
ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

SPRING 2025 GRADUATES



Nemesis Crociata, B.A. in Social Work

While in the program, Nemesis, served as PI for her study, “Target topics for anti-racist interventions online for White non-Hispanic digital natives.” Her work was accepted for presentation at Baylor’s National McNair Scholars Research Conference and UTSA’s Summer Undergraduate Research Conference.

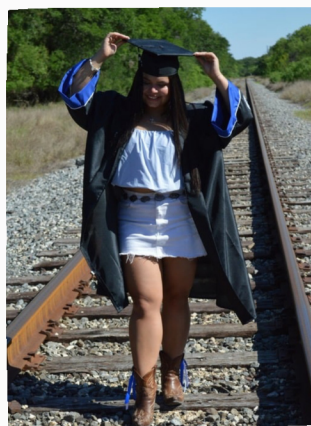
She will be attending the University of Connecticut this Fall to pursue a *fully funded* Ph.D. in Sociology.



Abigail Jimenez, B.A. in Communication Sciences & Disorders

While in the program, Abby served as PI for her study, “The Role of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Devices and Treatment Techniques in Mental Health and Self Advocacy.” Her work was accepted for presentation at both the UCLA and Baylor’s National McNair Scholars Research Conference, UTSA’s Summer Undergraduate Research Conference, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association National Convention, the National Conference on Undergraduate Researcher, the Texas Undergraduate Research Day, and the Texas Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

She will be attending the University of Texas this Fall to pursue a *fully funded* Master’s in Speech Language and Hearing Sciences.



Alexis Moreno, BA in Psychology Pre-Counseling & Criminal Justice/Criminology

Alexis served as PI for her study, “The Effect Administrative Segregation has on the Mental Health of Prisoners in Texas.” Her work was accepted for presentation at Baylor’s National McNair Scholars Research Conference, UTSA’s Summer Undergraduate Research Conference (where she placed 3rd overall for her presentation), the Southwestern Psychological Association, Southwestern Association of Criminal Justice, the National Conference on Undergraduate Researcher, and the Texas Undergraduate Research Day.

She will be attending Texas A&M University Corpus Christi this Fall to pursue her Master’s in Clinical Psychology.



Bianca Villalobos, BS, in Psychology Pre-Counseling & BSW in Social Work

While in the program, Bianca served as PI for her study, “Learning Coping Mechanisms for Social Transitions and Stress Management in College Students.” Her work was accepted for presentation at both the UCLA and Baylor’s National McNair Scholars Research Conference, UTSA’s Summer Undergraduate Research Conference, and Texas Association for School Psychologist Conference

She will be attending the University of Texas San Antonio this Fall to pursue a *fully funded* Ph.D. in School Psychology.

ALUMNI NEWS

Graduation

CONGRATULATIONS DR. ROBERTO SAGARIBAY III

Recent graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso



Dr. Roberto Sagaribay III (C/O 17)

Dr. Roberto Sagaribay III (C/O 17) earned his Ph.D. in Psychology with a concentration in Health from the University of Texas at El Paso. His dissertation, titled "Examining the Effects of a Week-Long Social Media Abstinence Intervention, iWeek, on General Well-Being, Mental Health, and Body Image Concerns in Latina College Students," explored how taking a break from social media could impact various health outcomes among Latina undergraduates. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory, Dr. Sagaribay's study randomized participants into two groups: one abstained from social media for a week, while the other used it as usual. Findings revealed that those in the abstinence group experienced significant improvements in depression, anxiety, stress, and body image satisfaction.

Although no notable changes were seen in overall well-being, healthy eating, or physical activity, sleep outcomes did favor the intervention group. These results suggest that even short-term social media breaks may offer mental health and sleep benefits for Latina college students. The nuanced effects on body image and sleep highlight areas for future research into the underlying mechanisms of these improvements. Dr. Sagaribay now serves as a Research Analyst for the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine at UNLV, where he supports faculty, residents, and students in designing, analyzing, and publishing research that advances health equity and clinical practice.

MASTERED IT! Congratulations to our Spring & Summer Graduates!

Jessica Corona, M.A.

Kimberley Carrizales, MSW

Amber Taylor, M.A.

Rebecca Donato, M.S.



Spanish
University of Texas San Antonio



Social Work
Baylor University



Writing
Rowan University

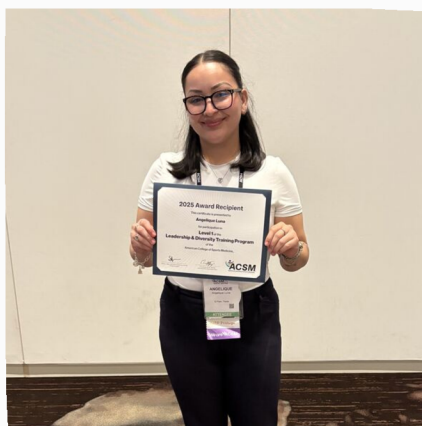


Marriage & Family Therapy
Our Lady of the Lake University

Not pictured: Frankie Saldaña, MSW; Social Work- Our Lady of the Lake University

ALUMNI NEWS

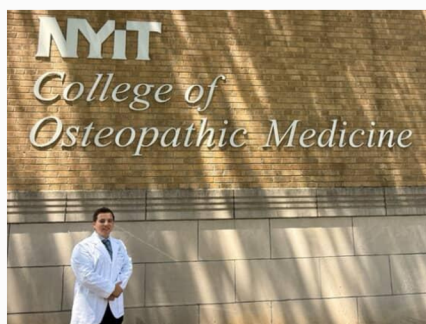
Career Support



Congratulations are in order for Angelique Luna (C/O 23) who was accepted into the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) Leadership & Diversity Training Program (LDTP) over the summer. This program mentors and retains ACSM minority members by offering three different levels of involvement including guidance through professional development, committee involvement, and opportunities to present and publish with ACSM with the ultimate goal of obtaining ACSM Fellowship.



Congratulations are in order for Dr. Elaine A. Peña, (C/O 2001), the new Director of American Culture Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. Dr. Peña is a Professor, Faculty Affiliate, and author. Her research centers around the study of borders, the study of religion, and the study of hemispheric Latinx performance. Her work looks carefully at the production and transmission of knowledge from a range of vantage points—from the printed word to embodied practice to the built environment. She is the author of two acclaimed books—*Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred with the Virgin of Guadalupe* (University of California Press, 2011) and *¡Viva George! Celebrating Washington's Birthday at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (University of Texas Press, 2020).



Congratulations are in order for soon to be Dr. Raul Gutierrez (C/O 2022). Raul took part in the White Coat ceremony at New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine (NYITCOM)-Arkansas Medical School as he embarks on his journey of becoming a physician. Raul shared “I am excited to begin medical school at NYITCOM-Arkansas and grateful for the support of my family, friends, mentors. The McNair Scholars Program played a pivotal role in my journey,

allowing me to conduct neuroscience research at UT Health San Antonio. This experience sparked my interest in neurology and furthered my curiosity to learn medicine. In addition to research, McNair provided mentorship, professional development, and a community of scholars that gave me the confidence to pursue medical school. While I am currently drawn to neurology, I remain open to all specialties and look forward to combining patient care with research throughout my medical career,”
-Raul Gutierrez.

STAY CONNECTED

There are several ways to stay connected with us. Follow us on Instagram, tell us how you're doing, and contribute to our Scholar Support Fund. This fund is set up to offset costs accrued by scholars not covered by the Department of Education, such as professional organization and GRE fees. Share your talents; sign up as a coach, connector, speaker, advisory board member, etc., or simply tell us how you're doing! As a grant recipient, the Department of Education requires that we provide information on your progress to a Ph.D. Additionally, current scholars need to see what is possible for them, and it is important to celebrate your success! We want to highlight alumni in all future issues of *The Phase*.

You are always welcome to reach out via phone at 210-431-4099, email us at mcnair@ollusa.edu, or stop by our offices located in Lower Level Moye.

[Click here to access our link tree](#)



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