

## **POLICY AND PROGRAM STUDIES SERVICE REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

### **The Educational and Employment Outcomes of The Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program Alumni**

This report presents findings from a study of the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement (McNair) Program. The McNair Program was established in 1986 to increase the attainment of doctoral degrees by students from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds. The McNair Program awards grants to institutions of higher education to provide participants with educationally enriching scholastic experiences that help prepare them to enter graduate school and to pursue and complete doctoral degrees.

The McNair Program is one of the Federal Trio Programs offered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to motivate and support students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Students typically enter the program during their senior year in college, although they are able to participate in the McNair Program during any year of their undergraduate studies. Recipients of summer research internships must have completed their sophomore year in college. To qualify for the program, students must be enrolled in a degree-granting program at an accredited college or university and be low-income, first-generation college students or underrepresented minorities who are not low-income, first generation.

The study was designed to address five key questions:

- To what extent do McNair Program participants earn doctoral degrees?
- In what fields of study are McNair Program participants earning doctoral degrees?
- To what extent do McNair Program participants join faculties of higher education upon completion of doctoral programs?
- What is the employment status of students who entered the program but for whom there is no evidence of an earned doctoral degree?
- To what extent are program participants still pursuing doctoral studies?

To allow sufficient time for a student who joined the McNair Program to graduate from undergraduate school and to obtain a doctoral degree, the survey sample for this study was divided into three cohorts—an early cohort of participants in the McNair Program between 1989 and 1993, a middle cohort of former participants in the program between 1994 and 1998, and a late cohort of participants who joined the program after 1999. We assumed that enough time had elapsed for a reasonable share of the respondents in the early and middle cohorts to have completed their doctoral studies at the time of our study in 2004. Therefore, those two cohorts were the focus of the analysis of doctoral completion rates.

- Survey results indicate that 14.4 percent of the early cohort of 1,807 former McNair participants reported earning doctorates, and 3.9 percent of the middle cohort of 7,122 former participants reported earning doctorates. Combined, 6.1 percent of former McNair

participants from the early and middle cohorts reported obtaining a doctoral degree by 2004. None of the respondents who were in the program between 1999 and 2003 had obtained a doctoral degree at the time of the study, which was not unexpected, given that they were likely in undergraduate school at least until the year 2000. In addition to the 14.4 percent of the early cohort who reported obtaining a doctorate by 2004, an additional 12.5 percent of the early cohort reportedly attained a first professional degree.

- Former McNair Program participants indicated that they received their doctoral degrees in an array of disciplines. The largest percentage of doctoral degrees earned by survey respondents was reportedly in the life sciences—for example, biochemistry, microbiology, agronomy, etc. (26.0 percent). McNair doctoral recipients were also concentrated in social sciences (24.1 percent) and physical sciences (14.6 percent). Those who earned professional degrees most often held doctorates of jurisprudence (55.3 percent), medicine (26.3 percent), and osteopathic medicine (8.7 percent).
- Twenty-nine percent of program participants reported being employed in higher education. However, among those McNair participants with either a Ph.D. or other doctorate, 65 percent indicated that they were employed in higher education (75 percent of the Ph.D. recipients and 50 percent of other doctoral degree holders). Only 4.4 percent of the professional degree recipients reported being employed by institutions of higher education.
- Among former McNair participants without a doctoral degree who were not in school, 83.8 percent of bachelor's degree recipients and 93.6 percent of master's degree recipients were reportedly working. Of the master's and bachelor's degree recipients currently in school, the majority—76.6 percent of bachelor's degree recipients and 62.6 percent of master's degree holders—reported that they were working.
- The highest degree reportedly earned by 47 percent of McNair alumni was a bachelor's degree. Of those with only a bachelor's degree, 62.4 percent of the survey respondents indicated that they were enrolled in graduate school—66.3 percent of them were enrolled in master's programs, 22 percent were enrolled in doctoral programs, and 15 percent were enrolled in professional degree programs. Of the former McNair participants whose highest degree was a master's, 28 percent were reportedly enrolled in graduate school—74 percent of them were in doctoral programs, 19 percent were pursuing a second master's degree, and 7 percent were pursuing professional degrees. Only about 2 percent of McNair Program participants said that they did not receive a bachelor's degree. The fact that the largest share of students enters the program during their fourth or senior year probably contributes to this low percentage of persons who report that they did not receive at least a bachelor's degree.

Figure 1 graphically presents the pipeline for producing low-income, first-generation and underrepresented minority doctorate or first professional degree recipients from an average of 100 McNair Program participants who had been in the program at least 10 years before the time of the study survey (the early cohort). This breakdown depicts survey findings converted from percentages to reflect a typical set of 100 McNair participants.

**Figure 1. Pipeline of Doctoral or First Professional Degree Attainment by Early Cohort Participants (1989–1993) by 2004—per Typical 100 McNair Program Participants at Least 10 Years after Program Participation**

