
Right: Director Cynthia Fraction speaks to several of the Excel! Scholars before they make their presentations.
From 2007-2013, the University of St. Thomas McNair Scholars Program served over 62 students, in numerous fields of study, who represented five local private institutions of higher education—with most students representing the University of St. Thomas.

This program was part of the National Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program—however, due to federal funding cuts, 40% of the 194 programs nationwide lost their funding, including St. Thomas.

It’s been reported that only five of the colleges and universities that lost funding made a commitment to continuing to fund their programs.

We are grateful and pleased to be among those five, and are thrilled that our students will be able to continue experiencing the significant success that students in UST’s McNair Scholars Program have experienced.

Some of the achievements we continue to celebrate with our McNair scholars is their admission into major research-based universities and professional institutions for graduate school. We were also proud to recently announce the first Fulbright Scholar to come out of UST’s McNair program.

This journey of preparing first-generation college students to become sought-after candidates for some of the nation’s best graduate schools continues with our new Excel! Research Scholars Program. In addition to supporting first-generation students, we also support U.S. military veterans and students from ethnic backgrounds that are underrepresented in graduate school.

This year, our new program successfully trained five outstanding Excel! Scholars. Eight new scholars will begin their journey in summer 2014.

These students are knowledgeable, intelligent, gifted and talented inside and outside of the classroom. Distinguished by their academic abilities, inquisitive character, and evolving leadership capacity, these students are agents for change in a world that desperately needs their contributions.

All of the students in our 2013-2015 Excel! Scholars cohort completed research on culturally challenging topics—showing that they are on their way to embodying UST’s mission as they grow into morally responsible leaders who can think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good. You can read more about their research topics on the following pages.

These scholars are making a difference on our campus. We are proud of them and proud to share their stories.

The Excel! Research Scholars Program helps students who are first-generation college students, U.S. military veterans, or of an underrepresented race in graduate schools experience graduate school acceptance and success. These highly-motivated students are prepared for advanced study through:

- faculty-mentored research experiences
- graduate school seminars
- graduate admission exam training
- writing assistance
- presentation training
- and more...

Learn more about the history of this program at UST, and meet our Excel! Scholars and faculty mentors on the following pages.
With the McNair Scholars Program as our foundation, we’ve been able to build a program that incorporates UST’s commitment to advancing the common good. As you’ll see on the following pages, our Excel! Scholars are taking on research projects not only to gain the necessary academic skills, but also potentially to create positive change in our communities. As current Excel! Scholar Maxine Johnson said, “We all want strong research skills, and we all want to get into graduate school—but there’s more of an ultimate goal. We also want to influence something or make some sort of impact in our field of interest.” Future Excel! cohorts will be challenged to change our world as well.

As of June 2014, five students—representing the first Excel! Scholars cohort—were halfway through the program. They began in summer 2013 by attending a series of seminars on topics such as the graduate school admissions process, research skills, presentation skills, networking, and much more, while also carrying out a faculty-mentored research project. In January 2014, they traveled to the American South to meet people who participated in the Civil Rights Movement, and find out what it means to be a person who will influence our world in a positive way. You can learn more about these students, their research, and their summer 2014 research plans on the following pages. Eight new Excel! Scholars start the program in summer 2014, with seminars and faculty-mentored research. We’ll share their progress with you in our next report!

Our McNair Scholars and Excel! Scholars have been accepted into summer research opportunities and graduate schools such as: Univ. of Michigan-Ann Arbor • Brown University • Johns Hopkins Univ. • Univ. of Maryland-College Park • Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison • Syracuse University • Univ. of California-Berkeley • Univ. of St. Thomas • Purdue University • Univ. of Chicago • Washington University • Columbia University • Emory University • Queens University-Kingston, ON • Univ. of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign • American Univ. • U of MN • Mayo Clinic Graduate School • and more...

**WHERE THE EXCEL! SCHOLARS ARE GOING**

**WHERE EXCEL! IS GOING**

**WHAT IT MEANS TO BE MENTORED**

One of the key elements of the Excel! Research Scholars Program is a mentored research experience, where students are able to dig deeply into an area of interest under the guidance of a faculty mentor. Students gain important research skills, and find themselves challenged in ways that are similar to experiences they will have in graduate school. At the same time, they also learn the value of becoming a leader from leaders who invest in them.

- Dr. Susan Callaway
  Department of English
  University of St. Thomas

- Dr. Meg Wilkes Karraker
  Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice, UST

- Dr. Roxanne Prichard
  Department of Psychology & Neuroscience, UST

- Sarah Sevcik, MPH, M.Ed.
  School of Public Health
  University of Minnesota

- Dr. Buffy Smith
  Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice, UST

We’re proud to announce the 2014-2016 cohort of Excel! Research Scholars and their faculty mentors:

- Anisa Abdulkadir
  Mentored by: Dr. Dalma Martinovic
  Department of Biology, UST

- Bryce Werner
  Mentored by: Dr. Thomas Hickson
  Department of Geology, UST

- James Mite
  Mentored by: Dr. Todd Lawrence
  Department of English, UST

- Kelsey Benton
  Mentored by: Dr. Sarah Hankerson
  Department of Psychology & Neuroscience, UST

- Quinmill Lei
  Mentored by: Dr. Roxanne Prichard
  Department of Psychology & Neuroscience, UST

- Raymond Nkwain Kindva
  Mentored by: Dr. Justin Donato
  Department of Chemistry, UST

- Tiana Daniels
  Mentored by: Dr. Todd Lawrence
  Department of English, UST

- Tyler Skluzacek
  Mentored by: Dr. Peter Ferderer
  Department of Economics, Macalester

- Raymundo J. Nkwain Kindva
  Department of Chemistry, UST

**MEET OUR 2013-2015 COHORT**

As of June 2014, five students—representing the first Excel! Scholars cohort—were halfway through the program. They began in summer 2013 by attending a series of seminars on topics such as the graduate school admissions process, research skills, presentation skills, networking, and much more, while also carrying out a faculty-mentored research project. In January 2014, they traveled to the American South to meet people who participated in the Civil Rights Movement, and find out what it means to be a person who will influence our world in a positive way. You can learn more about these students, their research, and their summer 2014 research plans on the following pages. Eight new Excel! Scholars start the program in summer 2014, with seminars and faculty-mentored research. We’ll share their progress with you in our next report!
SHANNON HEITKAMP
University of St. Thomas ’15
English/Economics Major

“The Excel! Program has completely changed how I view college, my work ethic and my own research, as well as what I’m capable of. It’s been really empowering.”

As an Excel Scholar, Shannon spent summer 2013 researching under the guidance of faculty mentor Dr. Susan Callaway of UST’s Department of English. Shannon’s project studied the university-level writing experiences of international students. In spring 2014, Shannon had the opportunity to work with Dr. Callaway again as a Collaborative Inquiry Grant recipient. This time, she studied the possibility that perceived differences between college writing center consultants and the students they serve could affect the success and satisfaction of a consultation.

In summer 2014, Shannon will be participating in the University of Michigan’s Summer Research Opportunity Program, which gives outstanding undergraduates the opportunity to work on graduate-level research projects with faculty. The goal is to prepare students for advanced studies in a Ph.D. program at U-M. Shannon will be working with the Education database through ICPSR, which is one of her areas of interest. “I love being a researcher,” Shannon said. “I’m very interested in looking at how we can deal with the education debt problem, and make higher education more inclusive for international and first-generation students.”

MAXINE JOHNSON
University of St. Thomas ’15
Psychology Major/French Minor

“By conducting research, I’ve become a lot more confident in what I’m doing, and that carries over into other courses. The Excel! Program has given me skills that go beyond getting into grad school.”

Under the guidance of faculty mentor Dr. Roxanne Prichard, of UST’s Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Maxine spent summer 2013 conducting a pilot study of whether first-person narratives could change how prostituted women are perceived. Maxine presented her research at several different conferences, including one presentation alongside Dr. Prichard and the executive director of Green Card Voices, a local organization that strives to create change by sharing first-person stories from immigrants. The organization and Maxine both hope to apply the methodology from the study to their research in the future.

In addition to presenting her summer research, Maxine has also been working as a research assistant in the lab of Dr. Megan Gunnar, Department Chair and Director of the University of Minnesota’s Institute of Child Development. She became aware of this opportunity as part of the Excel! Program, while conducting informational interviews with U of M faculty. Maxine will work there throughout summer 2014 and beyond.
Under the guidance of UST professor and faculty mentor Sarah Sevcik, MPH, M.Ed. of the University of Minnesota’s School of Public Health, Tamnnet spent summer 2013 exploring whether incongruences exist between the sexuality curriculum currently being taught to Twin Cities-area students, and the material that health educators believe is relevant to their needs. She also explored the challenges health educators face while teaching sexuality curriculum, and their perceived role in addressing the sexual health needs of students. “Excel! pushed me,” Tamnnet said. “Before, I thought I wrote well—but with Excel! I realized how my writing could be improved. I learned how to be clear with my thoughts, and how to include my voice but remove my opinion.” In summer 2014, Tamnnet will study at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island as part of The Leadership Alliance consortium’s Summer Research Early Identification Program.

“I think working toward graduate school is more difficult when you’re a first-generation student, because the people you’re closest to don’t know the process. Excel! taught me how to move through this. It’s had a profound effect on my life.”

Under the guidance of faculty mentor Dr. Meg Wilkes Karraker of UST’s Sociology Department, Priscila’s summer 2013 research studied whether liberal or conservative political preferences could be correlated to an attorney’s legal specialization, as well as attitudes toward immigration and its legislation. “I decided to do something on immigration legislation because I personally just went through the process of becoming a U.S. citizen,” Priscila said. “I grew up here, and in middle school and high school everyone was surprised to find out I wasn’t born here. So that’s one of the reasons I wanted to study perceptions about immigration, and the stereotypes.” Because of the connections Priscila made through the Excel! Program, during summer 2014 she will have the opportunity to work as an intern with Jim Hilbert, founder and Executive Director of the Center for Negotiation and Justice at the William Mitchell College of Law. She’ll also be working at the Conflict Resolution Center in Minneapolis.

“It’s a lot of hard work, and a lot of self-discipline—but you just grow from it. Not everyone gets to experience the Excel! Program, but if you do, it’s so worth it.”
Under the guidance of faculty mentor Dr. Buffy Smith, Alexander Tsadwa spent summer 2013 studying race and gender stereotypes in black-white intimate relationships, as well as attitudes toward these relationships in several different time periods throughout history. “I grew up in St. Paul and went to Central High School, which is a very diverse place, so I’ve always been interested in the dynamics of different relationships across all kinds of demographics—whether between men and women, or certain ethnicities or class groups,” Alexander said. “I know that with a graduate degree, if I can find things out about our social structure on a macro scale, support it, and have consistent findings with other scholars, I’ll be able to challenge ideas and the ways people see things like race, gender and class.” This summer, Alexander will be working as a research assistant for Dr. Meg Wilkes Karraker of UST’s Sociology and Criminal Justice Department.

"A lot of my friends aren’t that familiar with how higher education works, and it’s good for them to see that graduate school is a possibility. It’s a very real possibility. I wanted to improve intellectually, and be more diligent in my studies. That was accomplished, and I’m put on the right path because of Excel!"

People who want to do more with themselves will go out and try to engage others. That’s what I got from studying the Civil Rights movement, and I can see myself doing that as we speak. I’ve seen people apply for Excel! because of what I’ve told them about it. That’s a small beginning—but if we all end up having the highest level of educational attainment possible, there’s a lot of things you can start with that.

—Excel! Scholar Alexander Tsadwa

realizing that while we pay tribute to those who gave their lives, and celebrate leaders and victories from both the past and present, we also recognize that there is still work that needs to be done.
The Excel! Research Scholars Program is part of the University of St. Thomas Grants & Research Office. For more information, please contact us at 651-962-5960 or at excelscholars@stthomas.edu.

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Courtney Crowley, Graduate Assistant & Writing Specialist (2014-Present)
Sarah Muenster-Blakley, M.A., Graduate Assistant & Writing Specialist (2012-2014)

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