

McNair Scholars Program Central Michigan University

ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE: JUNE 12

MAKING CONTACT AT GRADUATE SCHOOLS OF INTEREST

It is apparent that establishing contact at your schools of choice is critical – in fact, it could very well be the thing that helps get you accepted and funded. You received some recommendations from Don Asher as to how to craft a letter for prospective faculty advisors and here is a quick recap of those main points.

Letters to faculty:

- be brief and to the point
- be sure to mention CMU and McNair
- introduce your research interests and intention of applying to their program
- indicate that you are familiar with their work (and actually read some!)
- probably the best questions to pose are whether they anticipate being able to take on new graduate students that following year and future directions for their research
- try to keep it to two short paragraphs and number/bullet multiple questions if you have them
- suggested subject line for the email: “Prospective Graduate Student”
- make sure you have an “alias” for your email so that your name comes through
- make sure you have a signature for your email that includes your name, McNair Scholar and Central Michigan University
- SPELL-CHECK AND PROOFREAD – you are trying to make a good impression!

Assignment Part 1: Craft a “base” letter to a prospective faculty advisor (use your top-choice school at the moment). This can then be tailored for other faculty at other institutions. Feel free to begin sending emails out to faculty when you are comfortable doing so (I do recommend that you have someone – i.e. McNair staff – look over your letter before you send it).

NOTE: Forging connections with faculty is no small feat. As a matter of fact, you will probably find the process extremely challenging and frustrating at times. In addition to contacting faculty and other graduate staff at institutions of interest, talking with graduate students currently in the program is an excellent way of finding out what “it’s really like” to study and be part of a particular department.

Letters to graduate students: These letters may be “more relaxed” than letters to faculty, but you still want to make sure that your correspondence results in a good impression. Don’t be too casual or send a note without correct punctuation and grammar. Don’t ask a million questions either! Ask them about their experience in the program thus far and whether they might have any recommendations with regard to approaching faculty and about the general “climate” of the department. Ask them one or two specific questions, but try not to “overwhelm” them with your inquiry. Definitely keep it to two short paragraphs. For the most part, you will probably receive friendly (and often quite detailed) responses since these students were “in your shoes” not too long ago.

Assignment Part 2: Make contact with one graduate student at each of your top three programs of interest (at least THREE grad students in total). Include copies of “sent emails” and responses (if applicable) for each. Please cut and paste these items into one Word document for ease in printing.

NOTE: For this exercise, you may have to do some “searching” before securing email addresses for current graduate students. Often times, you will be able to find this information via the web; otherwise, you may have to try contacting a department directly and asking whether they would be willing to put you in touch with an active graduate student.