STUDENT DIRECTORY

WELLESLEY M cNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM
DAPHKA ALIUS
Senior | Mathematics
Hometown: Miami, FL
Research Interest/Area: Application of Mathematics and Computer Science to Real World Problems

“I am originally from Haiti where I lived for nine years prior to relocating to the US. My interest in mathematics was partially motivated by the language barrier that I experienced while realizing that math is universal and that I didn’t need to understand English per say to compute and solve problems. Hence, I am particularly fond of technical subjects like Computer Science and Linguistics, which both have roots and traces of mathematical reasoning.”

CHANTELLE KATE BATACAN
Sophomore | Biochemistry
Hometown: Honolulu, HI
Research Interest/Area: Antibiotic Resistance

“I am a sophomore from Honolulu, HI and plan to major in biochemistry. I am interested in the development of new antibiotics and vaccines to target drug-resistant bacteria. After graduate school, I would like to return to an educational setting to mentor students from backgrounds like my own.”

MARIBEL CASTANEDA
Senior | Economics, Philosophy
Hometown: Los Angeles, CA
Research Interest/Area: Applied Economics

“I was born and raised in Southern California, which arguably has the best street tacos and weather in the country. However, I was eager to expand my horizons, and I decided Wellesley College was the place for me. I moved across the country, and it’s here at Wellesley that I continue to explore my passion for economics, and now philosophy. I hope to the earn my PhD in Applied Economics in order to become a professor.”
GORETTY CHAVEZ
Junior | Psychology
Hometown: Los Angeles, CA
Research Interest/Area: Mental disorders in children

“I grew up in Los Angeles as the oldest of four. I always thought I wanted to be either a pediatrician or an elementary school teacher. It was not until high school that I became curious about psychology. Unfortunately, I was unable to take a psychology course until my first semester in college. I immediately fell in love with the subject and knew that I wanted a career in psychology. I still enjoy working with children and, thus, I want to be a child psychologist.”

DAYNA DE LA CRUZ
Sophomore | Biology
Hometown: Houston, TX
Research Interest/Area: Use of White Ash by Birds in Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest

“I was born and raised in Houston, Texas and attended a public high school with more than 3,000 students. As a first-generation Latina and Posse Scholar recipient, I became the first student from my school to be admitted into Wellesley College. I have declared Biology as my major because of my interest in the interactions of animals and the environment. After completing my first field season as a field technician at Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest, I have confirmed my passion for research and hope to continue gaining experience through it. My goal is to inspire underrepresented women to further their education and confidently join the STEM field.”

AISLINN DIAZ
Senior | Psychology, Health & Society
Hometown: Dallas, TX
Research Interest/Area: Developmental Psychology

“I grew up in a big, close-knit family in Dallas, TX where I spent most of my time volunteering in my community. At Wellesley, I wanted to maintain that communal aspect and incorporate it into my professional goals. Here, I was introduced to research and different branches/applications of psychology and public health. I hope to continue my studies in these fields and work as a clinical child psychologist that helps children feel healthy and aim to reach their full potential.”
BREANA DUPREE-JONES
Junior | Computer Science
Hometown: Houston, TX
Research Interest/Area: Coding for Social Impact

“Hi Everyone, My name is Breana, and I am a junior studying computer science at Wellesley College. I am from Houston, so the change in weather climate in Boston was enlightening. I am interested in doing projects for social impact. I intend to study abroad in Italy in the coming spring semester.”

LOISELLE GONZALEZ
Senior | Biological Sciences
Hometown: Boston, MA
Research Interest/Area: DNA Oxidation and Nucleosome Stability

“I grew up in an underprivileged neighborhood of Boston, MA, with few educational opportunities. After graduating valedictorian from high school, I joined the class of 2019 at Wellesley, where I am majoring in Biological Sciences and minoring in Women’s and Gender Studies. Throughout my four years at Wellesley, I have been researching, and this year, writing a thesis on DNA oxidation and damage. Post-Wellesley I hope to do clinical research and eventually pursue an MD, MD/PhD, or MD MPH degree.”

MARIA GONZALEZ
Senior | Physics
Hometown: Alton, IL
Research Interest/Area: Biomimetic Robotics

“As an undergraduate, I have followed a winding path through the seemingly unrelated research topics of dark matter, metamaterials, water sustainability, and spider web vibrations, before noticing that I have an affinity for engineering-based projects. I hope to attend graduate school and study biomimetic robotics, with the ultimate goal of becoming a professor. I want to be able to not only teach students, but also contribute to mindful mentorship, especially to first generation, minority, and low income students like myself.”
KIM HERNANDEZ
Sophomore | Physics
Hometown: Houston, TX
Research Interest/Area: Applied Physics / Engineering

“Howdy! I grew up in Houston Texas where I attended a small charter school. This year I am a part of the Dark Matter Detection and Particle Astrophysics Lab with Professor James Battat. I am the Events Chair of the Wellesley Engineering Society and a member of the Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers at MIT. I plan to major in Physics and pursue a masters in Electrical or Mechanical Engineering. One day I hope to be an inspiration to first generation college students from diverse backgrounds that are pursuing STEM.”

SONIA HUPALO
Senior | Environmental Studies
Hometown: Minneapolis, MN
Research Interest/Area: Business and Technology

“Upon my arrival at Wellesley, I had not intended on taking an environmental studies course and let alone possibly considering it as a major. However, after taking a course on climate change early in my Wellesley career, I was pleasantly surprised! I really appreciate the interdisciplinary focus of the major and it has taught me to take different approaches to problem solving both in and out of the class. I am currently very interested in the intersection of business and technology and hope to pursue my Masters in Business Administration in the near future.”

HANNAH JACOBS
Senior | Biochemistry
Hometown: Bethesda, MD
Research Interest/Area: Genetics, Neuroscience

“I major in biochemistry at Wellesley and have enjoyed learning organic chemistry and computational modeling during my courses. I am also an Amgen scholar at the Phil Sharp lab at MIT, and my project is to predict microRNA targets in the brain. Upon graduation, I will pursue a PhD in the life sciences and I hope to perform more genetics and neuroscience research. I am excited to contribute to and benefit from the amazing McNair scholars support network.”

Wellesley College McNair Scholars Program
KEISHA JEAN-CHARLES  
Junior | Africana Studies and Economics  
Hometown:  
Research Interest/Area:  

“...”

LYBA KHAN  
Junior | Biological Sciences & Religion  
Hometown: Revere, MA  
Research Interest/Area: Ecology/ Clinical Research/ Biochemistry  

“I grew up in Sargodha, Pakistan and immigrated to Revere, Massachusetts with my family. Currently, I am attending Wellesley College, pursuing a BA in Biological Sciences and Religion on a pre-med track. At Wellesley, I am an active member of Al-Muslimat: I was co-social chair and I am currently the co-president for the organization. Previously, I have conducted research in Ecology – specifically: sustainable development. I am passionate about global climate change, equality (especially in education), medicine, and current international affairs.”

AMY LI  
Junior | Mathematics & Physics  
Hometown: San Francisco, CA  
Research Interest/Area: Analysis  

“I get excited about the rigour and structure of pure mathematics. Life becomes more interesting when one begins to examine the questions being asked and analyse the way answers are formed. On a personal level, I aim to transfer the skills of abstraction and specificity learned in mathematics to better understand the world around me. Professionally, I hope to work on applied math problems that have a quantifiable impact on underserved communities.”
QIAO LI
Junior | Biochemistry
Hometown: Braintree, MA
Research Interest/Area: Computational Biochemistry

“I grew up in China and moved to America in June 2012. I went to Massasoit Community College and then transferred to Wellesley College. I worked on ecological-based research for one and a half years at Massasoit, which investigated the influences of different types of land on the local ecosystem’s health. The experience I had in the research internship inspired me to major in biochemistry at Wellesley. This year, I am a part of Prof. Radhakrishnan’s lab that uses computational methods to analyze biological interactions.”

EMILY LIAO
Senior | Biological Sciences, Chinese Language and Culture
Hometown: Brooklyn, NY
Research Interest/Area: Cellular Modulation of Immune Tolerance

“The first time I was a teacher, I was two years old, peering into a crib with determination. My first lesson? Laughter. After years of tending to my brother and volunteering as a tutor to bridge language and educational gaps, it’s become second nature to teach and care for others. I stand before classrooms to empower my students, regardless of their backgrounds. In the future, I aim to use this passion to impact my community as a physician by promoting health literacy and preventative care.”

LYNANDREA MEJIA
Junior | Neuroscience
Hometown: Warwick, RI
Research Interest/Area: The intersection of neuroscience and music, and cognitive psychology.

“From a young age I enjoyed taking science courses and participating in hands-on science projects. At Wellesley College my interests in science became more defined as I decided to major in Neuroscience. At Wellesley I have had the opportunity to start learning some of the intricate neural pathways and functions of the brain. With each new course and research experience, I find the beauty and complexity of the brain to be factors that keep me passionate and curious about my field.”
ASHLEY PARRA  
Senior | Psychology and Education Studies  
Hometown: Tucson, AZ  
Research Interest/Area: Public Health  

“I was born in a small border town in Arizona and grew up about an hour away from there in Tucson, AZ. I attended Pueblo Magnet High School and after graduating in 2015, I came to Wellesley and decided to pursue psychology after taking the introductory course. My research passions are vast, as I have studied topics ranging from moderating factors of depressive/anxious symptoms correlated with the imposter phenomenon, as well as the physiological effects of social vigilance on the cardiovascular system. I hope to continue my research in Latinx mental health and eventually continue my studies in public health.”

BANG NHAN  
Junior | Chemistry and Philosophy  
Hometown: Worcester, MA  
Research Interest/Area: Nanoparticles/Nanotechnology and Material Science  

“I was born in Viet Nam and have lived in Worcester, MA since I was 7 years old. On my free time, I enjoy painting, reading, and media designing. At Wellesley, I work in the Flynn Lab on the synthesis and characterization of gold hollow nanospheres composed of alternating layers of polymers and polyoxometalate ions. During high school, I discovered that I really enjoy independent research as well as working with others to problem solve. I am particularly interested in teaching and becoming a mentor to students who come from backgrounds like my own. But whether I end up in academia or industry in the future, I hope to become a life-long mentor to students and/or aspiring chemists alike.”

JENNIFER NWAKO  
Senior | Biology  
Hometown: Union, NJ  
Research Interest/Area: Developmental Biology  

“I am a first generation Nigerian-American college student. I was born in Bronx, New York and grew up in Northern New Jersey. I am a Biology major with a minor in Africana Studies. In my free time, I enjoy reading, playing tennis and cooking. I work in the Martin lab at MIT looking at the relationship between developmental biology and cancer cell metastasis. I study how to induce EMT in Drosophilia embryos in order to discover the pathway that allows cancer cells to migrate. I am also Vice president of the Black Student Union on campus, a member of the African Students Association and a member of Alpha Kappa Chi, the classics society.”
CAITLIN PHAM
Sophomore | Bioinformatics
Hometown: Orange County, CA
Research Interest/Area: Public Health and Neurological Diseases

“As a student at Wellesley, I have been able to involve myself in a myriad of disciplines before deciding that Bioinformatics was the major I wanted to pursue. It allowed me to combine my interests in biology with computation and has encouraged me to push myself and step outside of my comfort zone. I am also very passionate about health and medicine, and hope to be able to do work that minimizes health disparities in different communities.”

CINDY PERAZA
Sophomore | Biology and Psychology
Hometown: Revere, MA
Research Interest/Area: Using Bdellovibrio bacteriovorus and Atomic Force Microscopy to Remove Biofilms

“When I was introduced to biology and psychology as a high school student, I was instantly enamored by the two subjects. My love for biology and psychology propelled me into taking more biology and psychology courses at Wellesley College, which further fueled my passion for the two subjects. My passion for biology made me realize that I wanted to participate in research. Currently, at Wellesley College, I work on a project that aims to eliminate biofilms with Bdellovibrio bacteriovorus and Atomic Force Microscopy.”

MARIA PHAN
Junior | Chemistry
Hometown: Rahway, NJ
Research Interest/Area: Nano and Materials Science

“I grew up in a very diverse city with my father and brother. Because my dad worked a lot, my brother and I kept each other company by creating different games from anything we could find around the house. Seeing how tirelessly my dad works inspires me to do whatever it takes to have a better life for us in the future. I knew I wanted to study the sciences after 7th grade when we learned about how the cells in our body worked. My research focuses on optimizing the use of different functional groups on gold nanoparticles for in vivo biocompatibility. Outside of Wellesley, I enjoy watching movies, eating out with friends, and playing with anyone’s dog.”
ANDREA SAMA
Senior | Biochemistry
Hometown: Seattle, WA
Research Interest/Area: Molecular and Cellular Biology and Ecology

“I grew up in Seattle Washington, and attended the University of Washington for a year before transferring to Wellesley College. At Wellesley, I became involved in a research lab on campus that focuses on ecosystem ecology. I also participated in an REU program at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign that focused on biogeochemical processes in agricultural soils. I plan to continue doing research that focuses on the environment after graduation.”

CASEY SMITH
Junior | Neuroscience
Hometown: San Leandro, CA
Research Interest/Area: C. Elegans longevity and metabolism

“I began my research endeavor at my local Children’s hospital where I worked two summers performing both clinical and basic science research. My clinical work involved understanding the development of acute chest syndrome in sickle cell patients, and my lab research observed cancer cell surface expression during adhesion and migration. Currently I study lifespan and metabolism in the model organism C. Elegans. I hope to continue research as a career in the biomedical sciences.”

ISSA TINNEY
Junior | Astronomy & Computer Science
Hometown: Milwaukee, WI
Research Interest/Area: Engineering and robotics

“My family and I had to move after almost every school year. I love the novelty of finding something new about the world. I started college with the intention of majoring in astronomy or physics and pursuing it into research that would bring me closer to my dream of becoming an astronaut. I felt laughed out of class during introductory physics and thought I wouldn’t be back; I discovered I was afraid to fail. Although I can't change the currents in my life, I can always adjust my course.”
ALEJANDRA UCHITELLE  
Junior | Biochemistry  
Hometown: St. Louis, MO  
Research Interest/Area: Nanotechnology  

“I was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri and spent the majority of my time in high school assuming that I would pursue a career in music education! I changed my mind my senior year and ended up at Wellesley, where I discovered my passion for biochemistry after testing my luck with the pre-med track, an economics major, and a chemistry major. Aside from research, I am a member of the Agora Society, the political society at Wellesley.”

VERONICA VALENCIA  
Senior | Economics and Cognitive Sciences  
Hometown: Atlanta, GA  
Research Interest/Area: Aging Biology and Bioinformatics  

“Born and raised in primarily Mexican-American community in South Texas, I saw the many ways education and healthcare failed minority communities in the United States. As a current senior at Wellesley College double majoring in Economics and Cognitive Sciences, I continue to study the relationship between primary language use and lexical diversity among young children in bilingual families. I hope to pursue a PhD in Healthcare Policy and continue to advocate for educational reform in the United States.”

ASRIEL WALKER  
Senior | Biochemistry and French  
Hometown: Fairfax, VA  
Research Interest/Area: Biophysical Properties of B. bacteriovorus Adhesion  

“I am from a large county about 30 mins outside of Washington D.C. in an area affectionately known to the natives as NOVA (Northern Virginia). As an undergraduate student at Wellesley College I have explored many different personal interests including the theatrical arts, music, French, and biological sciences. In the wake of my senior year however, I have decided to focus on my passion for biochemistry and medicine as I consider my future career. I am excited to spend my years after graduation following my nose through the world of global medicine and making meaningful contributions in pediatric health care.”
DR. VALDEZ
Director | Biological Chemistry & Molecular Pharmacology
Hometown: Enid, OK
Research Interest/Area: Vascular Biology & Diabetic Retinopathy

“I grew up in a city of 50K people in OK and went to college in town with even fewer people (10K). As a graduate student at Harvard, I gained much more than the knowledge necessary for characterizing a mouse model. As President of the Graduate Student Council, I discovered that I am passionate about mentoring students, increasing diversity, and student advocacy. This has led me to a career in higher education administration where I hope to inspire and mentor young scholars from diverse backgrounds.”

ADRIAN ESTRADA
Coordinator | Sociology/Anthropology, Comparative Language & Linguistics, and French and Francophone Studies
Hometown: San Francisco, CA
Research Interest/Area: Communication, the many facets that inform human behavior and the human experience

“I was born and raised in San Francisco, CA and attended Earlham College - a small liberal arts college in the midwest. I was fortunate enough to be a McNair Scholar myself and had the opportunity to conduct research in a living history museum as well as a foray into the hybrid-language Spanglish. After moving to Boston I found a home in higher education, and as fate has it, I have come full circle and I am fortunate and excited to be working with students from diverse backgrounds in hopes of encouraging them to pursue their academic and personal goals.”