

McNair Scholar will focus on brain research at Baylor College of Medicine

Baylor College of Medicine
HOUSTON -- (June 2, 2010) -- The first [McNair Scholar](#) [1] to join the [Baylor College of Medicine](#) [2] faculty will focus on research of the brain.



Dr. Benjamin R. Arenkiel

Dr. Benjamin R. Arenkiel has been named a McNair Scholar in neuroscience. He is investigating how neurons make and maintain proper connections during development and throughout adulthood.

"Ultimately, the more broad-sweeping goal of this research is to reveal potential therapeutic avenues to repair or replace damaged or diseased nervous tissue," he said.

Rising stars

The McNair Scholars program identifies "rising stars" in four areas of biomedical research – neuroscience, juvenile diabetes, breast cancer and pancreatic cancer.

Arenkiel, currently a Howard Hughes Medical Institute postdoctoral fellow in neurobiology at Duke University, will join the genetics faculty at BCM.

"Through the generosity of Bob and Janice McNair, we are able to recruit young investigators who are poised to become leaders in their fields," said Dr. William T. Butler, interim president of BCM. "This is the first of many McNair Scholars who will be named to the faculty of the college through this program."

Specialized faculty recruitment

The [Robert and Janice McNair Foundation](#) [3] gave the college \$100 million in 2007 to begin a specialized faculty recruitment program, the McNair Scholars Program, which keys on collaboration.

"We offer financial support to outstanding scientists to entice them to come to Baylor and the Texas Medical Center," said Bob McNair. "One of the requirements is that the scientist must be willing to cooperate and share information with other scientists working on similar projects,"

Collaboration key component

McNair, owner of the Houston Texans and a BCM board trustee since 1994, said the commitment to collaboration is a key component of the program he and his wife, Janice, funded through their foundation.

"Our reasoning is simple," he said. "Time is of the essence as we seek cures for cancer, juvenile diabetes and neuro-psychiatric disorders – and we don't need people reinventing the wheel. If we are successful, and I believe we will be, there will be plenty of credit to go around."

Arenkiel will be part of the BCM research team at the Jan and Dan Duncan Neurological Research Institute at Texas Children's Hospital.

He described BCM's affiliations in the Texas Medical Center as a "perfect marriage between basic science research interests and longstanding clinical goals."

"I am excited to be on the ground floor of this initiative and look forward to engaging in creative and productive collaborations aimed at bridging bench-side research to bedside therapeutics," he said.

Other McNair Scholars will be appointed in the coming months. All of them will be new faculty members at BCM. They will be provided support through the program for eight years. McNair Scholars will have lifetime use of the title.

Arenkiel received a bachelor's degree in biology from St. Cloud State University in Minnesota in 1998, and a doctorate in genetics from the University of Utah School of Medicine in 2004. During his doctoral training, he worked as a graduate research assistant in the laboratory of Dr. Mario Capecchi, who won the 2007 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine.

He joined Duke University's Department of Neurobiology as a postdoctoral fellow in 2004.

Arenkiel has earned several awards, including the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression's (NARSAD) Young Investigator Award in 2009.

[SOURCE](#) [4]

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