McNair stresses importance of knowing oneself

As jobs were more plentiful than later in the seventies, it was a good time to be studying physics. But whether the job prospects were a little better or a little worse, I strongly encourage participation in science and engineering — if that's what you want. The job market can change, and if you're doing what you like to do, you'll be more likely to find employment. If science or engineering is right for you, it can provide a truly fulfilling career. For me, knowing that I could peer into the microscopic world where normally I cannot see and actually affect change was exhilarating.

An undergraduate I had learned and taught karate, and during my time at MIT my karate activities took a great deal of my time. It was thoroughly worth the effort. For me, karate not only helped me to stay physically attuned, but greatly alleviated the mental stress of graduate school. It also afforded me an outlet for my teaching interests. Karate combined teaching and physical exercise in a flowing art form. I loved it, and it helped me keep both feet on the ground — except when I taught kicks, of course.

Both in terms of karate as well as physics I was very fortunate to have found what I enjoy doing early in life. Finding what you like to do is an important first step towards success. Once you have found your interests you can act on the motivation within you. It is this motivation that can steer you onto a course that is right for you. Along the way, get out and take advantage of the opportunities around you. Find summer employment near and talk with people who can assist you on your way.

When I was a graduate student, I often felt that students — and particularly minority students — got into an isolated mode. I think it's tough when you try to bear all your burden alone. We can achieve a real camaraderie among people if we allow it to happen. With such friend-