

JOHN B. HAMMOND III

SB 1984 (mechanical engineering) MIT, MBA 1988 (marketing and finance) Emory University, doctoral candidate at Sloan School of Management, MIT; mechanical engineer, Motorola Inc., 1984–1986; program researcher, Advanced Technology Development Center, 1987–1988; financial analyst, Polaroid Corp., 1988–1990; senior financial analyst (consultant), Hewlett-Packard Co., 1990; associate dean of admissions, MIT, 1991–1993; vice president, Black Alumni/ae of MIT (BAMIT); area director, chapter president, and chapter advisor, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.



I grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in a fairly segregated community. My parents and I lived in Scotlandale, which is a northern suburb of Baton Rouge, predominantly black. Mainly, my friends at home were black. But my education, from the very start, was in predominantly white schools. My mother and father almost insisted that I go to these integrated communities, because they felt that I should be in environments where I learned how to negotiate both worlds. So from kindergarten on, I was in an integrated environment, working primarily with white folks. It was in 1966–67 that I would have started first grade. I was born in '62. All the way through to the time I graduated from high school, which was in 1980, I've been in predominantly white environments.

My father was the oldest surviving son out of thirteen kids. My father's father married my grandmother, who had one son before they got married. Then my grandmother and grandfather had thirteen kids. She had eighteen births and twelve of them lived. My father was the oldest male child there. He had one older sister. None of my relatives on my father's side, none of my uncles or aunts, finished college. I think maybe one or two finished high school. I had three aunts and nine uncles. The three girls may have finished high school, but none of the guys did.

My mother had four siblings, who all finished college. My grandfather on my mother's side worked at Tuskegee and was a mason. So I would represent the third generation of college participants on my mother's side, but the first generation on my father's side. My father has been working

every day of his life since he was thirteen. He met my mother when he was about twenty-five or twenty-six. They got married and have been living in Baton Rouge ever since then.

I have one younger sister. I can't call her "little sister" anymore, not to her face anyway. She's five years younger. She must be thirty-one or thirty-two years old.

You went to elementary and high school in a predominantly white setting. Were there any highlights of that period and any people who you felt were very influential in your life before you finished high school?

My early education was sort of interesting. I had a female cousin, a first cousin, who was really close to me in age. In fact, we were in the same grade level. Her mother taught her how to write very early on. I felt very competitive with her. She would always be on the honor roll. In second



Edited and excerpted from an oral history interview conducted by Clarence G. Williams with John B. Hammond III in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 26 May 1999.

grade, I had a teacher who I thought was very nice and it was the first time I made the honor roll. I was very happy about that, sort of proving myself. Of course, I didn't make the honor roll again until I was in sixth grade.

My mother never pushed me to read or to write. Her philosophy was basically that when I felt like I was ready, I would bring the books to her and I would start reading. Basically, I did that and I haven't stopped since fourth or fifth grade.

In sixth grade, I had a white male teacher who was wonderful. His name was Mr. Mott. In fact, I remember all my elementary school teachers by name. I still keep in contact with a fifth-grade teacher, a black woman, who was also very instrumental in pushing me to think that I could do well academically. But this sixth-grade teacher was very, very important to me. He spent a lot of time talking to me about my academics and he encouraged me to study. When I did well, he was very praiseful and so forth. That encouraged me to continue to study harder. I made the honor roll in sixth grade, because I wanted to do well and he showed me that I could.

In seventh and eighth grades, I participated in sports and did well academically. Eighth and ninth grades were sort of a pivotal time in my education. I had been going to Baker Elementary School and Junior High School, and basically now had to choose a high school. All of my friends would have naturally gone to Baker High School, because we went to Baker Elementary and Baker Junior High School. But between the eighth and ninth grades, the school district rezoned and unless you had an older brother or sister who went to high school, you weren't allowed to go there unless you lived in the right district. Of course, I didn't think I was going to go to Baker, because I didn't have an older brother or sister at the high school.

Just in that same year, they were beginning a magnet program at Baton Rouge High School for gifted and talented students. I thought I would just go there, but during the summer, between my eighth and ninth grade years, I got a call from the athletic department at Baker High School. They said I could come if I played football. I had played football in junior high school. When I talked to my parents about it, they left the decision to me.

That was probably one of the first major decisions that I had to make in my life. I was in eighth grade, thirteen or fourteen years old. I

decided at that time to take a very critical look at myself, that I was probably more gifted in academics than I was as an athlete, and I chose to go to Baton Rouge High School. That probably made all the difference in my life to this point. I was challenged academically. I was put in an environment where people had high expectations of my performance, and that stood me well.

I look back now at my father, who didn't finish high school, and my mother, who is an English major—an English professor—and part of me wants to say that they let me make the decision because they didn't want the responsibility of making it. But I don't think that's quite right. I think that at that age they were trying to instill in me the kind of thoughtfulness required to make those kinds of decisions. I appreciate that they did that, because subsequently I had to make other important decisions I felt equipped to make.

How did you decide to come to MIT as an undergraduate? Making the decision to come to MIT wasn't nearly as eventful as doing what it took to get in. I had wanted to go to MIT since I was in sixth grade. I would read magazines like *Popular Science* and *Popular Mechanics* in sixth grade. This sixth-grade teacher I was telling you about basically turned me on to those, and I would discuss what I read with him. In every other article, there was something about MIT—MIT this or MIT that. So in sixth grade, I decided this MIT must be the place to go. In seventh grade, I was always reading these magazines and MIT stayed in my mind.

When I was in the eleventh grade, basically between my eleventh and twelfth grade years, I went to a couple of summer programs—MITES, Minority Introduction to Engineering and Science—and became oriented to this whole idea of engineering and science. One program was at Georgia Tech and the other was at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania. I decided I definitely wanted to become an engineer, and I wrote to MIT.

I wrote to MIT every year I was in high school, requesting an application. I filled it out every year I was in high school, because I wanted to see what my application looked like. At the time, they would send out college bulletins if you wrote in and requested one. I had a college bulletin at home for MIT for every year from my freshman year in high school. So 1976, 1977, 1978—every year I had—I would look through

and I would think about which courses I might take. That's the way I was focused on being at MIT.

When I applied to MIT, I applied to a number of schools. MIT was one of them and, of course, my number one school. But I also applied to Georgia Tech and Morehouse. I got into every one I applied to. I had all the information except for MIT, so I didn't think I was going to get in. I wrote to Georgia Tech and sent them my housing deposit. I remember it was a Saturday afternoon after that that I got the letter from MIT. I was so happy! I went to my room. On the wall in my bedroom, I had painted this big bull's-eye. As soon as I got the letter, I went in and I painted "MIT" right in the middle of it. It was really the happiest day of my life at that point, that acceptance.

I'm not sure exactly how it all happened. Several of the acceptance letters had gone out and I hadn't heard from MIT. The mother of one of my classmates, who was a biologist or a physicist, knew Wes Harris. She got Wes Harris's address and gave it to me. I handwrote a note to Wes Harris, saying—I don't know exactly what it said—something like, "Dear Professor Harris, I really want to come to MIT." I wrote that letter and the next thing I knew I got my acceptance letter.

I never knew whether or not there was a connection, until I became the associate director of admissions at MIT. At that point they had kept all the minority students' files, applications for admitted students. They had kept all the files from before the time I had applied. In my folder was that handwritten letter. It was really incredible. That's the only way I could have known. I don't know what influence it had, but it was really powerful for me to find that letter.

You really had to know that Professor Harris actually followed through in some way, in order for that letter to get into this folder.

I always wanted to come to MIT from sixth grade on, and was very happy I got in.

Talk a little bit about your experience as an undergraduate. Do you recall your early impressions of MIT? What are the things you would consider very positive and things you wouldn't consider so positive as you went through those four years?

My first encounter with the school was the day I arrived for Interphase. My family didn't have the higher education savvy to know the importance of visiting the schools and so forth. Quite frankly, it

really didn't matter. I had been admitted to MIT, so I knew I was going to go there. I didn't have to visit the school.

So the first time I saw the school was when I came here for Interphase. We were staying in East Campus. East Campus, actually, was quite a nice area—beautiful lawn, and so forth. I had the image of this sort of Ivy League university where people were very smart and they all wrote very well and they had intellectual conversations about important things. That was sort of the initial impression. Of course, everybody I came in contact with were minority folk, and I anticipated it might be that kind of environment.

When the semester started, it really started with a bang. My first semester here was okay. Academically, it was pretty good. Then in rush week, a couple of things happened that I found a little bit disturbing. A lot of folks were on campus, because the regular term had started. There was one party I was interested in going to at one of the fraternities. When I got to the door, they wanted to see my freshman ID, which was a piece of paper with a little picture on it. They told me the party was full and they didn't allow me to come in. But one of my best friends—Mike Durham, who is one-thirty-second Indian, but white for the most part—came along after I had been denied admission to this party. I asked him to go and ask if he could get in, just to see if they would let him in—and they did let him in.

That really disappointed me. That sort of shaded my whole vision. It turned out that at almost every other rush party I went to, they always wanted to see my ID. I didn't experience them asking other students—white students—to see their ID. I presume it was because I was black.

My first semester, academically, was fine. The second semester was a lot tougher. I failed one class. I failed 8.02, which was electricity and magnetism. I'll never forget, the spring just before I left to go home, that I didn't know whether I had passed. I called the physics department and spoke to somebody, I think her name was Judy Bostock. I'll never forget this phone call as long as I live. She told me that because I had not done well in 8.02, which is a course designed to bring lots of information together from different courses, I should reconsider whether or not I wanted to be an engineer and whether or not MIT was the right place for me.

That was the last conversation I had with one of the faculty members before I left to go home for the summer. It scared me to death. But again, at that moment, I decided there was no other place on the planet that I would go to other than MIT. I decided that not only would I go to MIT, I would graduate from MIT and I would graduate in four years, no matter what it took.

I went home that summer, I thought about it, I cried about it, and I talked to my parents about it. There have been subsequent times when I thought maybe MIT wasn't the right move for me. One time I thought about transferring to Georgia Tech, but I just couldn't. Every time I thought about that, this conversation played over in my head. I went to school at MIT fall and spring, and then when I would go home for the summer and work, I would take courses over the summer. I would take humanities classes in the summer, just so I wouldn't have to take such a heavy load when I came back in the fall and spring. I did that every year, because I was committed to getting out of here in four years.

My experience in general, I think, is one I would never want to do again. But at the same time, I don't think I would have wanted to do it any other way. I learned a lot and I matured a lot, but I sometimes wonder whether or not I could have been in a place that left me feeling more whole, more like I didn't leave so much behind, like I wasn't beat up so badly. I think I could have matured and learned the same amount of material at another school, perhaps, without feeling so alone.

I have heard this, by the way, from a number of students. Many of you are really stars where you come from, and then you get broken down here. On the other hand, you've gone off and become so successful. Do you believe, as a person who has dealt with Admissions and selecting students here at MIT—and you know the kind you bring, you bring in first-class young men and women, particularly people of color, who are just the best we've got—that they would be better off going somewhere else?

In my educational history, I've matriculated at four universities. Those summers when I was going to college and taking courses in humanities, I went to Southern University. In the latter part of my senior year in high school, I went to Louisiana State University and took a calculus class. I had

taken all the math at the local high school. I did my master's at Emory University and, of course, I was here. My experience has been that for the minority students I came in contact with, and in my own personal experience, every one of these other institutions has been more positive—more affirming to me—than my experience here as an undergraduate.

With Southern University, a historically black college and university, there is just no comparison. Faculty members were very concerned about not only my academic development, but my social development as well. They expressed those kinds of concerns in making sure I learned the material that was provided for me to learn; they expressed those kinds of concerns in designing a curriculum that allowed me to engage the subject matter as well as my fellow students. There was a combination of things going on. It wasn't just my own personal encounter with the materials, it was my encounter with the students and the materials and the whole educational process. I felt that that was very positive for me as an individual, to have that kind of experience.

Similarly at LSU. It was a calculus class, it wasn't a sociology class like at Southern. But I still felt in that classroom environment that I had more of an opportunity to engage with fellow students and to operate in an environment that was smaller in class size. The calculus classes there weren't huge. There were thirty-five people or so, so I got a chance to meet my classmates and that was also very helpful for me.

I don't know what the quality of these other educational institutions is that makes them different from MIT. I do know there is a sense of aloneness here that is difficult to get used to. I sometimes think that probably it's because I lived on campus as opposed to living in an environment that was more like home. The one semester I did live in Chocolate City, that felt best to me because I felt I had a place I could come home to where people were doing what I know people do when they come home—watching TV or sitting around together doing homework. That was one of the best semesters. That was the second semester, I think, of my junior year—or maybe that was my whole junior year. Then my senior year I moved off campus. That was also quite nice, to be in the Cambridge community around folks who were not involved with MIT.

I don't know what it was, precisely. I can't isolate what has made the MIT experience so lonesome in some ways.

Talk a little bit about any memorable role models and mentors in your studies and subsequent career.

At MIT, there were people who basically were there for me when I needed them. Those people did include you. Mary Hope was a woman who made a real difference in my life. She called me into her office one day and asked me how I was doing. No one had ever done, or has ever done, anything like that for me at MIT. She's the only person who ever did that for me. It wasn't that I was doing poorly, she just wanted to know how I was doing. That surprised me, because I thought I was in trouble when I got the note. So Mary Hope is one of those people.

Everybody who was a part of the Office of Minority Education in the early years—people like Pearline Miller, Gloria Payne, Mireille Desrosiers—took care of me. Mireille typed up my undergraduate thesis, didn't charge me anything, and was just happy to do it. Pearline and Gloria gave me a place to work. I worked there as one of their coordinators, so I had a little extra money to spend. Then my senior year, there was Jim Hubbard, who basically took me under his wing and provided me with a research opportunity that turned into an undergraduate thesis. He also just interacted with me in a way that made me feel comfortable. He would kick my ass when I needed to be motivated and, when I did a good job, he would not hesitate to tell me I did a good job. It was a very real relationship.

I want to get a sense about your career. It's sort of unique, in the sense that you actually spent a large portion of it so far here at MIT as the associate director of admissions for undergraduate students. I'd like to get your thoughts about your experiences there and what you learned that you think would be helpful not only to MIT but to the community.

I learned so much, actually, in that position. First and foremost, I learned that the students I met—minority students, white students, Asian students, a real mix at MIT—are the very best students in the country. I think a lot of the kids I talk to, including myself when I was here as an undergraduate, feel that somehow their name sort of slipped through the cracks and somehow they're not really supposed to be here. I don't know what other peo-

ple felt that way, but I know I felt that way. Somehow I think we probably just feel that the accomplishment that comes to us isn't deserved.

I learned that all the kids who come through the door are stars. I base that conclusion on the kinds of accomplishments they have made in high school, the grades they have achieved in high school, and the test scores they have achieved in high school. Many students have exhibited their unique qualities—their academic achievement and their personal achievements—while they achieve levels of leadership in their school. Their extracurricular activities often involve just amazing things—Eagle Scouts, entrepreneurial ventures, and just incredible acts outside of the classroom as well as inside. These kids are just exceptionally, exceptionally bright. I learned that that is true. I realized somebody must have seen something like that in me as well, so it was a very self-affirming experience.

The other thing I learned in that position, as associate director of admissions, was not only how bright the kids were coming in, but also how a lot of the minority kids—particularly the black kids—weren't being successful in getting out. They weren't graduating on time the way a lot of the white kids were. And what I learned about MIT was that nobody responds to anecdotal information. It wasn't enough for me to say that I felt black students were not graduating at the same rate that white students were or other students were. Nobody responds to that, because nobody knows what that really means. The best way to ask a question is to present data and let the data ask the question.

Once I discovered that, I went about the job of putting together a set of data that basically asked the question in a very stark way: Why aren't black students graduating at a rate similar to that of white students, when you look at race and gender? I had data for twenty-five classes of undergraduate students. I presented them to a few people, because they were very sensitive data. I actually am never really sure what the conversational reaction was about it. I didn't really think it was that important for me to know, but I did know that the people I presented the data to were people who were decision makers and who would not look at the data lightly.

So I learned a lot about the ways that, at a place like MIT, you ask questions or you query the

senior administration and so forth. That was very helpful to me.

Could you say a little bit about what you thought the data said in terms of black students and other minority students graduating from MIT at a different rate from white students? Was there anything you could see that was not being done?

I had from the registrar, after some manipulation, the graduation rates by race and by gender for all undergraduate students from about 1968 or so until about 1990, somewhere along that time. I had been reading an article in the NACME journal, where they talked about what they called “relative retention rates.” The idea I took out of the article I read in that magazine was that since MIT doesn’t like to compare itself to other schools, I would generate an internal comparison of MIT graduates, looking just at MIT graduates.

So the assumption I basically started with was that all these freshmen come into the same set of experiences. They basically experience the same sets of academic challenges and so forth. The resources that are available to them, that they take advantage of, were left out of these data. I was only looking at the graduation rates. What I did was look at the graduation rates of black students, Hispanic students, Native American students, Puerto Rican students, and white students. I basically asked, at what rate are these students graduating relative to all students? For example, I looked at the overall graduation rate and then I took a particular sub-sample or sub-group and I asked, what is their graduation rate? That index was what I called the relative retention index. For example, in the year I graduated, 1984, I would look at black men who came in in 1980. In the four-year graduation rate for black men, as it relates to overall graduation rates for that class, you would see that black men graduated at a rate of forty-four percent—I think the number is forty-four percent—of that overall class.

I had the graduation rates for four-year, five-year, seven-year, and nine-year graduation rates for these different groups. I could trace this and see whether or not minority groups would catch up or some group would catch up with the overall graduation rate. So rather than the data actually saying anything to me about the resources that students utilize or why, the very powerful question that came out was, Why, if a group of students

comes in here and are exposed to the same academic environment, are they graduating at a rate so much less than other students? Knowing what I knew about the admissions process—and feeling that those students were coming in very capable, sometimes perhaps even more capable than their white counterparts—why weren’t they graduating on the whole at a rate more similar to the rate white students were graduating at?

When I presented those data to the administration, the question I hoped would be asked of the Institute was, What are we not doing and where are we failing the students? That’s what I sort of concluded—that somewhere along the line, the students were being failed. They weren’t being supported in the way they needed to be supported in order for them to achieve the same graduation rates as white students.

Nobody had ever done that kind of study. I think you were about ready to leave at that time, and to put together that kind of data required a hell of a lot of work in addition to your other work. I thought it was a remarkable job and it got a limited amount of response. What you did was very similar to what Wes Harris did when he spent about three or four years as the first director of the Office of Minority Education, and he didn’t have hard data like you actually presented. What you did was put the data on top of the theory that he laid out without hard data. Here you came a few years later and added the hard data, which is what MIT is supposed to rely on, and I think we’re still trying to get the Institute to look at that.

I somehow believe that putting together a report like that now would be very, very, very difficult. Somehow my sense is that either the data are not maintained in the same way as to allow that kind of analysis, or getting those data would require the highest levels of authority. For me, the reason I put this together is that I began to feel uncomfortable as an agent for the Institute, going out and selling MIT to young minority folks. I needed to understand why I was feeling uncomfortable. The reason I was feeling uncomfortable is because I was going out there and talking to the very best minority kids there were in the country, and I was inviting them to an experience that could possibly damage their lives and, more importantly, damage their self-concept.

That was important to me and I needed to understand that. It changed the way I went about

my job. I would go out then, after having this information, and tell students and parents honestly about the challenges that MIT had to offer. It was not that it was a bad school, but it wasn't right for everyone—the decision should be made seriously and the commitment should be taken very seriously. No one ever told me that. I was never recruited, so I never heard the Admissions people. But I heard other people talking, and they never talked about how important that commitment and that decision should be, especially for minority kids. That's what I began to emphasize with the students and the parents.

What kind of advice would you give to a young John Hammond coming as a freshman to a place like MIT? Assuming he has made the commitment to come to MIT, I would tell that person to connect himself with people who have been here for a long time, to get to know faculty and administrators who have been around for awhile. Even if they're not assigned to you as advisors or mentors, seek them out. Maintain connection with community. Don't let yourself get lost at MIT. Stay connected. Find St. Paul's AME Church, go every Sunday, and get to know some of the people outside of MIT who are there who will invite you into their home and give you a nice home-cooked meal from time to time, just so you can maintain perspective. And work very hard.

I think those are a few pieces of advice that will serve black students particularly well, and minority students well in general. Find a community outside of MIT, apart from it, that will make you feel that you continue to be a part of your own cultural community. Find people at MIT apart from faculty members and the students. Make a collection of students, faculty, and staff who have been around the place for awhile and who can help you achieve that perspective. Then work your butt off, because the fun will come later. There are so many things to do in Boston, but that will all come later.

Is there any advice you could give to the MIT administration as to how they could make the environment better for black and other minority students?

I think I would begin by telling them that it's not just about making MIT better for black and minority students. I think if MIT were to take a serious look at itself, it would realize that many of the students are having difficulty with the acad-

mic pressure and pace of the Institute. Those who achieve success here achieve it at a price that is not easy for them to value at this point in their lives. In other words, they come here, they are successful, and they look back three or four years later at what they have had to sacrifice in order to achieve that success, and only then have they had the life experiences that allow them to value what they left behind them here. The students themselves don't have what it takes to appreciate the value of the sacrifice they make in order to achieve that success.

I think that achievement comes at the cost of sometimes being socially more mature. I know people personally who are very bright people and very successful at MIT, but they cannot carry on a cocktail conversation for ten minutes. That's kind of sad in some ways. I think if the Institute focused on the quality of life for all students, the quality of life for minority students would improve as well.

I think places like the OME will always be important to the Institute. You always have to act affirmatively towards students who are finding it difficult to achieve academic success. Those students aren't always minority students—sometimes they are white students. As an Institute, we have an ethical responsibility to make sure those students we admit have the support necessary to graduate. I think if we open our eyes we will find that it isn't always minority students who take advantage of these opportunities, and that any way at all we raise the level of academic or student support, then the level of services for every student—not just black students or Hispanic students or minority students—rises too.

What advice would you give to a young black administrator coming to a place like this?

Find a mentor and pester him or her, put yourself in their back pocket, make yourself be around that person. It doesn't have to be a black person, but it should be somebody whose experience and whose style you admire. Tell them so and connect yourself to them. I think the advice I got and the advice I would give is to know your area, learn your business, do it better than anybody else in that area, and then fight for advancement. It's about that, because it cannot be that blacks are less capable than whites in administrative roles.

But if you look around, you sort of see that blacks—less than whites—find it difficult to

achieve senior level administrative positions. That, to me, just doesn't compute. In the same way that you have very bright minority students coming in here, I have to believe that black administrators out there are a very incredible group of people. The fact that they have not achieved the highest levels of academic administration suggests that there is something artificial that is keeping them from achieving those goals.

Again, there's a feeling of isolation that I had early on in my administrative career. But I think that finding those mentors and attaching oneself will help facilitate upward advancement—and then promoting yourself, going on, and getting involved.

What would you advise the administration to do in terms of enhancing the role of black administrators?

To promote more blacks to higher levels of academic administration, period. We have black administrators who have been here long enough, who have years of experience and who ought to simply be promoted. One of my philosophies around this whole issue of promotion and environment is that that's where the difference lies between affirmative action and creating a diverse work environment. Affirmative action creates the opportunity for blacks, minorities, and women to achieve positions where they have been locked out. But just because you open up opportunities for people to be in these positions doesn't necessarily create a diverse work environment, a sort of nurturing environment for diversity. A diverse work environment requires that there be minorities at every level of the administration.

I don't think we have that here. White folks cannot sit at a table and evaluate black administrators fairly and equitably when there are only white folks sitting around the table evaluating black administrators. In the same way, a group of men sitting around a table cannot evaluate the effectiveness, commitment, and loyalty of a woman employee, if it's all men sitting around a table. They have no idea of the kinds of challenges that she might face, specifically as a woman, in her role in that organization. For them to say they can effectively evaluate her based on standards that are considered generally by the evaluation of other men is, I think, unfair.

I think the way to begin to think about creating an environment that's more conducive to

increasing the levels of effectiveness and success for minority administrators is to promote more minority administrators into higher positions. There are people who have the experience and knowledge to serve in higher positions, period.

You will soon or may already have completed your Ph.D. in management at the Sloan School of Management here at MIT. I think you may be the first or second black male to get a Ph.D. from the Sloan School.

I wasn't aware of that.

I think that's quite an accomplishment. What can you say about that experience?

I've got to tell you, my experience at the Sloan School has not been uncomfortable. I believe that is because I did my undergraduate degree in engineering here, so I just don't feel there's a beast big enough out there in the jungle who could scare me any more than that. Whenever it growls, I just basically pull up my sleeve, show the scars, and say, "If you think you can do better than that, go ahead." I just don't think there's another educational experience that could in my mind provide the kind of fear and intimidation I felt when I was here as an undergraduate. So going through the Sloan program has been my reward for having a very challenging undergraduate program. I'm not really ashamed to say that I graduated as an undergraduate, "Thank you, Lord." I went out of here with a 3.4 out of 5 grade point average, I think that's right. My grade point average at the Sloan School has been 4.9 out of 5. I got one B in my first semester, and that's been it.

The faculty has treated me very, very well and students have shown me a tremendous amount of respect. The administration has been responsive to having me be a part of the recruitment process for other minority Ph.D. candidates and some minority MBA candidates. I think their commitment to black folks and minorities in general, if there is a long-term commitment, has been fairly new. They hired a person whose responsibility it is to go out and recruit minority MBA folks, and he has basically tripled the size of the minority population in every class since he has been here. He has done a wonderful job, Barry Rickley. Now that there's sort of a core group or critical mass of folks there, I think the environment has begun to shift for those who are there, because now they can walk around campus and find people who are more like

them. I think that before, maybe three or four or five years ago, that was not the case.

At the Ph.D. level, it's still horrible. At the Ph.D. level, there are only—that I know of—two blacks who are permanently registered in a Ph.D. program. I'm one of them, and there's another guy named Greg Scott. At the faculty level, my sense is that there's only one black faculty member there and he's new, a junior faculty member. I don't think he's tenure-track right now. I think he's on as a visitor and at some point he's supposed to be transitioned over to tenure-track. So at the doctorate level and at the faculty level, it has been very bad for minority folks and black people in particular.

But in dealing with folks around here, folks just don't bother me. They will try to say things, but it just doesn't matter. Every now and again I have to just say, "Well, you know, when I did my undergraduate here in 1980, twenty years ago, it was like this." That will usually shut a lot of people down, because there are few people who have been around for twenty years. Every now and then I'll whip that out and that has made my life a lot easier. A lot of people like to say, "Don't do your undergrad here," because it's such an ordeal.

I do believe you would be the first African-American to complete the doctoral program over there.

The only other black person to get a doctoral degree from Sloan that I know of is a guy named Allen Afuah, and he is actually from Cameroon.

You may have been the first African-American student. Is there any other topic or issue that relates to your own experience or the black experience here at MIT?

You asked me earlier about advice I would give to someone who was a freshman here at MIT. There are two things I want to say. If I had an opportunity to talk with a young, talented, bright minority person before they got to MIT, I am not sure I would encourage that person to come here for an undergraduate experience. I think I would encourage that person to go someplace else to get an undergraduate degree. If they still felt they wanted to come to a place like MIT, then I would encourage them to do it at that point.

For example, I've run into a couple of fellows who went to Georgia Tech for undergraduate degrees and then came to MIT to get their graduate degrees. These young men exhibited quite a bit of confidence, something I had not seen among

many MIT undergraduates who were in Course VI. These guys came in from Georgia Tech and they were really, really bright. They had a sense of confidence in their abilities, and their graduate careers were quite successful.

My own daughter now says she wants to come to MIT and become a chemical engineer like her mother. She would have to really, really want to come here for me to give her my blessings to do so. I just would hate to see what happened to me happen to her. I don't want her to have to do what I've done in order to be successful. I don't want her to have to learn to do the things I've had to learn to do in order to be successful. I want her confidence to come solidly built, step by step, rather than having to make claims of self-confidence that one isn't really sure about. I want her to feel good about who she is through college and graduate school. I wouldn't necessarily encourage her to come here, unless I felt the place had changed. I don't think it has changed sufficiently between the time I was an undergraduate and now.

The only other comment I would make about MIT—and this is my own personal experience, I guess—is that it's quite a lot to go through. As an undergraduate, I met a woman who would eventually become my wife, we were divorced, and then I met another woman through my graduate career at MIT who would eventually become my wife. I'm not sure I'm bitter about MIT. I somehow just feel I'm not sure where MIT's role comes in, whether it's more of a personal issue, but I somehow feel if we had not come back to MIT, we would have been able to save our marriage. I don't know why I say that, other than that's something I feel.

So what is the take-away? The take-away is that MIT really is very focused. The people who come here and are successful are very committed to their careers. If they are very committed to their careers in a way that they can be successful at MIT, there's very little else of them to commit to anything else. So if you're considering coming to a place like MIT, coming to MIT, you have to take very seriously that level of commitment and ask yourself whether or not at the end of the career, having made that kind of commitment, your expectations were fulfilled.

To me, that answer is no. I could never find fulfillment committing myself that deeply to any

institution other than my family or my wife, who always come first. It's also quite important that my wife feels the same way. For that reason, I know that as a faculty member I could never be truly successful in an MIT sense, because I am not willing to give up in my family life the things I would have to give up to be successful here. Consequently, I'm going to a place where I feel I can find a better balance between the work environment and personal life. I'm more family-oriented, not so career-oriented.

I think truly successful people at MIT are very career-oriented and will find fulfillment in that. The people who are happy will also be career-oriented and find fulfillment in that life, in pursuing that career. My great fear around what happens to some people at MIT is that for a long time they're career-oriented, but when they get to a later point in life and look back, they realize they have sacrificed so many things—too many—and that it's too late. I would never want it to be that way for me.