

UNH McNair Fellow Earns Regional Award

By [Kim Billings](#)
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- A University of New Hampshire McNair Fellow graduate has been awarded one of only two New England Educational Opportunity Association Achiever awards. NEOA is the regional arm of the National Council for Opportunity in Education.

Hiep Nguyen, currently a graduate student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was part of the McNair Fellowship Program during the summer of 1998, and studied with David Gress, UNH professor of civil engineering. Under Gress, Nguyen spent 10 weeks conducting research on the early distress of Wyoming's Interstate 80 due to the use of recycled concrete aggregate.

Born and raised in Vietnam, Nguyen was in Saigon in 1975, when South Vietnam fell. His two older brothers were declared MIA/POW. Despite years of hardship, he managed to get a job at a state construction company. In 1992, 12 years after he first wanted to immigrate, Nguyen left for the U.S. with his wife and two young sons.

"Hiep faced incredible cultural, economic and emotional obstacles when he first arrived," says Meredith Maust, UNH's McNair Program coordinator. "Despite that, he achieved tremendous academic success while being an activist and role model for the Asian community in Boston."

He graduated from Bunker Hill Community College with an associate's degree and high honors in five different majors: computer information systems, computer science, mathematics, sociology and general concentration. He transferred to Tufts University and earned a B.S. in civil engineering last year, graduating summa cum laude. He currently is enrolled in a master's program at MIT.

"The McNair Program at UNH gave me honor, training and support," Nguyen says. "After fleeing Vietnam with my family, I came to the United States in the hope of restarting a modest life in this country. However, after being accepted to the McNair Graduate Opportunity Program at UNH, I gained more confidence and inspiration for a lifelong academic career.

"The McNair Program was a wonderful bridge that has led me to the next level of my scholastic life. People at UNH helped me gain an edge for graduate school admissions and the skills needed for graduate studies."

According to Maust, the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program was established in 1986, in memory of Ronald E. McNair, astronaut and member of the Challenger space shuttle crew.

This federally funded program provides grants to selected institutions for the purpose of preparing eligible undergraduates to pursue a doctoral degree. "The purpose of the program is to prepare students for graduate study in the hope that one day they will become researchers and scholars," Maust explains. McNair Fellows participate in a ten-week residential instructional/research experience at the University of New Hampshire under the guidance of McNair Program staff and UNH faculty mentors.

Although many UNH McNair Fellows attend UNH as undergraduates, many others, like Nguyen, are from other universities, including the University of Rhode Island, Middlebury College in Vermont and Truman State University in Missouri. For more information on the McNair Program, call 603-862-0088.

March 9, 2000

[Back to unh.edu.](#)