

GT numbers: why I'm gtg and you're gte

Every year many students are left wondering about the reasoning behind the seemingly randomly-assigned email account numbers. The Technique digs deeper into the issue to give you, the reader, the story behind your number

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By Scott Meuleners / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

Ever wonder why you're just a number to Georgia Tech officials, and why your number starts with "gte" and your friend's number starts with "gtg"? OIT assures that there is an explanation to this e-mail madness.

By Joshua Cuneo
Senior Staff Writer

Every Georgia Tech student is familiar with the concept of GT account numbers-the seemingly random combination of alphanumeric characters assigned to each entering student that becomes one's college e-mail address and login name at any of the campus computer clusters.

Yet according to OIT, the department that assigns GT account numbers, there's a method to this madness. Every student account number by rule begins with the letters "gt" followed by either four digits and a letter, or a letter, three digits and another letter. Employees also have a GT account, which feature the employee's initials followed by a number.

This system evolved from the basic procedure used to assign GT accounts back when they were first introduced in November 1987. "It used to be that if a student was assigned a post office box, the ID would be created by putting a 'gt' in the beginning, taking the last four numbers of the post office box, put that in the middle, then followed by a letter," explained Monica Rowland, Department Manager in the OIT Customer Support Center.

However, if the student came in without a post office box assigned, they would be given an account beginning with "gt," but followed by a letter, three arbitrary numbers, and then another letter.

More recently, as incoming freshmen began registering online during FASET much earlier than before—before they had received post office box numbers—OIT was forced to abandon their previous assignment scheme.

“When that happened, everybody got ‘gt’, a letter followed by numbers, then another letter,” said Jason Belford, Assistant Support Specialist to OIT. “That pretty much ended ‘gt’, four numbers, and a letter. Everybody was being rolled in prior to having a post office box. That’s where we get the more common format.”

Numbers are assigned to new students based on the order in which their name arrives at OIT. “Now, it is sequentially done based on our feed from Banner [Tech’s online registration system],” said Belford.

“Our feed looks at who registered for last semester, who registered for this semester, who registered for next semester, because that way it knows which accounts to delete [and] which ones to add.” As new students are assigned account numbers, the system increases the previous account number by 1. When it gets to 999z, it goes to the next letter.

This incrementing continues even as old account numbers from students long graduated become defunct. OIT can recycle old numbers, but they’re hesitant to do so. “It does have the possibility of being recycled,” said Belford. “Have we recycled them? Maybe under a system fluke, we have. We have not purposely done it....There are bigger troubles if we do.”

Instead, OIT tries to permanently reserve its account numbers for the students that once used them. That way, said Rowland, “people can return.”

Yet despite the logic and efficiency of this system, one of the most frequent complaints raised against OIT is that GT account numbers are too ugly and impersonal. Why, the argument goes, aren’t students given more personal user IDs, as is the case at some other schools?

One of the primary reasons, explained Rowland and Belford, is that Georgia Tech introduced the system so early that the technology at the time did not allow it. “One of the reasons the account was created was as a login account,” said Belford.

Georgia Tech had by then employed UNIX to satisfy its networking needs. “Up until just a few months ago, user names on a Unix box could only be up to 8 characters...We had to fit in that limitation.”

There also needed to be a definitive way to distinguish between student and employee IDs, and two standardized, differing algorithms for the two groups allowed that distinction. One reason this was necessary, explained Rowland, was allocation of resources. “An employee might not need as many BANANAS or allocations that a student would need,” she said, “so there had to be a distinguishing feature built into them.”

Students frustrated with the impersonality of the GT account number system used to have an alternative: e-mail aliases provided by ResNet, the IT support arm of the Department of Housing.

Starting in the mid-1990s, ResNet provided students with unique, easy-to-remember aliases for their regular Georgia Tech e-mail accounts at a time when internet aliases were scarce and expensive.

“Any person with a prism ID could authenticate using their Georgia Tech OIT-given account name and password,” explained Adrian Smith, the ResNet

Program Manager.

“They would log into the system, and they were allowed to create one alias that could point to any e-mail address that they chose.”

That address would read as the user’s chosen name@resnet.gatech.edu. A similar ResNet service provided custom host names (a user’s first name.resnet.gatech.edu) that pointed toward the student’s IP address during a given semester.

However, the ability to create ResNet aliases was recently canceled a few months ago, upsetting many students who appreciated the easy alternative the system offered over the direct use of one’s GT account number. That decision, explained Smith, arose due to a variety of factors.

One was the growing popularity of the aliases. “Not having an operations center 24 hours a day almost 365 days a year, we could not effectively manage or support that service,” Smith explained.

“We had a couple of times last year when we had a few minor issues with our server during the holiday weekends, and that caused problems with people because that was the only e-mail address they were publishing.”

“It was taking it farther than the intended purpose of the original program,” he said. “When it came right down to it, there was no way that we could support it effectively with the resources we were given to the extent that the people using it wanted.”

To compound the problem, the system was heavily used by the wrong students. “I also ran some statistics on students using the system, and I found that 50% of those actively using their aliases were not in our residential halls any longer,” said Smith. Furthermore, the program that provided the aliases became increasingly difficult to manage. Originally written by a student, when he left, ResNet had to continually support the software through periodic upgrades of their server.

“It was on Linux, [and] every time we’ve updated Linux, we’ve had to modify the code because [it] was very specific, because of the different things [we’re doing],” said Smith.

“We were spending a significant portion of time recreating a system on the back end to make it work.”

Those factors weighed together demanded elimination of the service. But for users who were infatuated with the system-particularly the tech-savvy computer users-there are plenty of options available, said Smith.

For example, with domain names becoming cheaper, many students have begun buying their own domain names and creating e-mail addresses based on those.

“Now e-mail addresses are available free, and even when you sign up with a dial-in or a broadband account, they basically give you however many e-mail addresses you want,” said Smith.

“It’s very inexpensive now that web space and storage space have gotten a lot cheaper over the past few years.”

Both ResNet and OIT are also working together toward better options for e-mail addresses. Smith has tried collaborating with OIT to introduce a system similar to ResNet aliases that could be supported under the department’s 24-

hour, 7-day-a-week service center.

However, that may not be an option until further in the future, he said, for OIT's resources are currently directed toward other, more pressing projects.

Belford, of OIT, is also on a team that is in the finishing stages of replacing the current account management system with an upgraded one, which promises a number of improvements. "As a student and an employee of Tech, you would get two different accounts," he said. "A student coming in here will have one account. They become a staff, they'll have that same account.... The format of that name will change, the process you have to go through to get the account may change."

But, Belford said, "The direction we're moving is person-based."

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Safe Space program provides haven for GLBT and allies

By Jason Reeves

Contributing Writer

With the growing concern with diversity both at Georgia Tech's campus and nationally, it comes as no surprise that Tech will begin offering a Safe Space program in upcoming years. This program specifically offers a place where students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) may come to talk and to receive advice.

According to chair Matt Ridley, the main objectives of the program are varied.

"The program will provide a supportive environment for GLBT members of campus, to facilitate their 'coming out' process, to foster a social climate in which others do not feel the need to express anti-gay attitudes in order to 'fit in', to dispel negative stereotypes and present factually accurate information about GLBT people, and to publicize other support resources or structures that are available on or off campus."

Starting this year, the program is spearheaded by Ridley, a member of the Pride Alliance, along with others such as Dean Stephanie Ray and community service/MOVE advisor David Prohitt.

"Safe Space, or similarly named 'Safe Zone' programs, are happening all over the country, particularly in institutions of higher education," said Ridley. Like the other Safe Space programs at over 125 other colleges across the nation, Safe Space is intended to promote understanding and acceptance of differences in sexual orientation.

This program is intended to inform students of the presence of 'allies' at Georgia Tech. Allies are individuals who may or may not self-identify as members of the GLBTQ community but who show respect and concern for the safety of members of the GLBTQ community. Often, however, there is no guide for the GLBTQ ally. "These heterosexual allies often will have few skills or resources available to them and no information to guide their own development or to help others become better advocates for the GLBT student population...Safe Space programs provide a way to train allies to be just that, allies," said Ridley.

He stressed the importance of training allies. "Heterosexual staff and faculty can have a significant effect on creating a positive culture welcoming GLBT students into any student population," he said.

This year returning housing staff members have had the option to take a course explaining the purpose of Safe Space and how to become active in it. Ridley said that the training involves "receiving a packet of information and resources as well as being trained on basic information as to the needs and

how-to's of being an ally.”

Joann Spinchcomb, a returning Community Advisor (CA) in the east campus apartments said that the Safe Space information was “hands down the best part of housing training this year.” It was described as well thought out and thorough, and it emphasized what life as GLBT member was like.

The training also emphasized the necessity to have a person to come to who would be an ally as well as someone students can trust with delicate information regarding GLBT status. Spinchcomb is “happy to be a part of the program...proud to be able to place the sticker on her door,” as she thinks that the program will definitely benefit the Tech community.

Safe Spaces will be located around other areas of campus as well as in some of the residence halls. Locations of the Safe Spaces on campus will be posted on the Safe Space website, <http://www.safespace.gatech.edu>, which is currently under construction. For now, Ridley stressed for people interested in signing up for training to e-mail him at gte784v@mail.gatech.edu.

“Simply look for the safe space logos/stickers to be displayed on office doors and bulletin boards,” he said. Students who want to learn more about the program can also speak with Ray, Prohitt, Billie Pendleton-Parker, Ann Pitini, Ridley or Brett Hulst.

The program is officially sponsored by the Office of Diversity Issues and Programming and the Department of Housing, while all funding has been provided by the Georgia Tech Student Foundation.

While Safe Space is geared toward the GLBTQ community, it is a program that offers safety not only for gays and lesbians but for all students.

According to Ridley, it is another step that Georgia Tech will take as an institution to uphold its commitment to diversity and mutual respect of all students.

Recycling isn't just for aluminum cans and newspapers

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Courtesy of the School of Industrial Engineering

Chemical engineering associate professor Matthew Realff (center) and industrial engineering professor Jane Ammons (right) aim to make recycling computers more efficient for consumers and corporations.

By Madhu Adiga

Senior Staff Writer

Crash! Thud! Hear that? That's the sound of another Tech student tossing his obsolete computer off some random rooftop. Why? Because he can...besides, what else is he supposed to do with it?

Industrial Engineering professor Jane Ammons and Chemical Engineering associate professor Matthew Realff hope to change that. Their collaborative research on optimizing reverse production systems aims to make recycling computers a more consumer and corporate-friendly practice.

What is a reverse production system? Commercial production occurs at a centralized location and then is spread out to the consumer community. Reverse production, then, such as recycling computers, seeks to optimize bringing products back in from consumer regions to a centralized region for processing.

The pair first began studying reverse production systems in 1995 with alumnus Ray Anderson, now CEO of Interface. They set out to optimize carpet recycling systems and found that it was best to have one central collection for different types of carpet, rather than to have companies set up a competing network of collections. They then received two National Science Foundation grants, one in 1998 and one in 2001 to recover and reuse materials found in electronic waste, more commonly known as e-trash. "We were both interested in environmentally conscious design and manufacturing

systems,” said Ammons.

This is becoming especially important because the Environmental Protection Agency estimates that over 250 million computer monitors will become obsolete over the next three years. Most obsolete computers in the U.S. wind up in landfills. The average computer monitor alone contains two to four pounds of lead, which can easily seep into the groundwater of landfills.

It’s not that no one knows how to recycle computers. Metal from the chips can be recycled, as can the plastic from the hardware. Facilities up north can recycle the cathode ray tube (CRT) glass from monitors into glass for new monitors. However, the average consumer wouldn’t recycle old computers as readily as he would aluminum cans and newspapers, because he can’t just leave the computer in a recycling bin out on the curb. Consumers don’t want to pay for the shipping of computers to recycling facilities and manufacturers don’t want the responsibility of disposing of computers they sold years ago.

“It’s a matter of taking all variables into account and coming up with a cost-effective solution,” said Realff. However, there are a lot of variables. For example, the re-usability of discarded computers depends heavily on how old they are. Also, the absolute volume of recyclable material is not something that can be plotted over time. “People in the U.S. have a lot of storage space in their homes, and they tend to keep things like old computers for years at a time. So when there’s an incentive to clean out e-trash, you’ll get a high volume of materials initially because people are cleaning out their homes, but you don’t know that you’ll get the same amount the next year or the next,” said Realff.

“Also, collectors have different agendas. Some want to dispose of e-trash, but others want to recycle it, or donate discarded computers to the needy,” said Ammons.

Then there’s the issue of where to set up collection and recycling centers. Georgia, for example, has a very uneven population distribution. It’s obvious that one center would be set up in Atlanta, but how many should be set up elsewhere in the state, and where should they be? Right now, the facilities available to recycle CRT glass are in Ohio and Pennsylvania, but would it be economically sound to set up one in the south, or ship materials to the already established recyclers?

“It’s a systems problem,” said Realff. “It’s not a problem that you can solve by just changing one or two conditions, because they’re all interconnected and it’s not just one variable that gives you the answer.”

To tackle such a complicated problem, Ammons and Realff use mathematical modeling to take into account all of the different parameters involved. “We use a mixed integer linear programming model to develop a robust solution that minimizes cost,” said Ammons. Mixed integer linear programming takes into account discrete variables such as cost and number of computers, as well as flow variables. “The model creates a superstructure with all the variables in place and possible locations of recycling centers, and the package picks out the locations with the lowest cost,” said Realff.

The research actually serves a twofold purpose. The application of the mathematical modeling is clear, but there is also a theoretical benefit. “In using this model, we’re not only trying to optimize this particular reverse production system, but we’re understanding how to solve large-scale problems in general,” said Ammons. Although the model only deals with the

state of Georgia, the team's hope is that it will be a system that other states can use as an example for setting up their own recycling initiatives, as well as a convincing argument to policymakers.

Ammons is a government-appointed member of the Georgia Computer Equipment Disposal and Recycling Council, and within the next year, she and Realff anticipate optimizing their model to figure out economically sound recycling options in Georgia and suggest this to state legislators.

"It's a matter of recognizing that waste is just a resource in the wrong place," said Realff.

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Students return from summer vacation to a completed Technology Square

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By Scott Meuleners / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

New signs direct visitors of Technology Square to the various new venues. In addition to the Barnes & Noble, Tech Square also features a new hotel and conference center, parking deck and numerous restaurants.

By Joshua Cuneo
Senior Staff Writer

[Editor's Note: This article is reprinted, with minor modifications, from the July 11 issue of the Technique.]

Georgia Tech is catching up to its red-and-black rival in one key area: we're finally getting its own college town.

At least, that's what Rosalind Meyers, Associate Vice President of Auxiliary Services, is calling the new multi-block facility whose stores have been opening sporadically since June. Originally proposed by President Clough and his senior administration in 2000, Technology Square was designed to meet several objectives. One, Meyers said, "was to create a retail hub...where students could go and have the feel of a college town that was off campus but on campus at the same time."

But the Square was also born with other intentions in mind. "One was to integrate Georgia Tech more with the Midtown community so that we felt more a part of Midtown, and Midtown felt more a part of Georgia Tech—rather than have us isolated on the other side of the interstate," said Meyers. This, she said, is why they chose a site across the Fifth Street Bridge. Also, the shortage of campus space demanded expansion, and transferring the College of Management and the Global Learning Center to a new facility would afford more breathing room for the remaining departments.

The project seemed promising from its outset. There were unusually few

obstacles; in fact, the biggest impediment was campus skepticism concerning the location of the square.

“If you had seen this site two years ago, even though it was so close to the campus, it looked like a big wilderness,” explained Meyers. “It was just vacant space with no buildings...and the people said, ‘Why do you want to go there? There’s nothing. It’s so far from the campus.’ But actually, now, it is the campus.”

The total cost of the project was \$191 million, which includes “the architecture fees, getting all the permits and licenses... [and] getting this site ready for construction. The rest of the costs are people who work here at Georgia Tech, and they worked a few extra hours, but it didn’t cost any money,” said Meyers. “It’s so exciting. We didn’t mind the extra time.”

The project was funded through the purchase of bonds by the various departments associated with the Square, and the departments have made individual plans to repay the bonds. The College of Management, for instance, has actively pushed fundraising since the Square was first conceived, and the Georgia Tech Hotel and the Global Learning Center will raise the money through the revenue earned from regular business.

The project has also benefited from constant student input. “Way back-let’s say two and a half years ago-there was a big student committee that...came up with a study of all the things that they would like to see here,” said Meyers. “All the time that we’ve been working with retailers, we’ve had a student representative from the Student Government...come to all of our retail meetings.” That input helped the project team make a selection of restaurants and other retail outlets that “are going to be reasonably priced, appeal to students and to the surrounding community, and... complement each other.”

Barnes & Noble at Georgia Tech

The centerpiece of the Square opened its doors last month: Barnes&Noble at Georgia Tech, a fully-stocked, official Barnes&Noble bookstore with every major genre of literature (including an extra-large science fiction section for its Tech customers) and plenty of lounge chairs for the leisure readers.

Along one side is an expanded collection of Georgia Tech paraphernalia, which sits beneath a mural illustrating Tech’s culture and history. An information center is the store’s centerpiece, and extra cash registers crowd the front entrance in preparation for the great textbook rushes that precede fall and spring semesters.

Up a short flight of stairs is the essential Starbucks, with dozens of tables and chairs for studying and socializing, a diverse menu, and late hours for late-night studying. In the back is a separate concession store, stocked with a larger variety of drinks and snacks than Burdell’s.

An escalator takes the customer up past a hanging model of a Schoenbrod rowing shell used by the Georgia Tech Crew Club in the late 1980s (the shoes of the last riders are still inside) to a strip mall of specialty shops. Against one wall is the electronic shop, where students can browse shelves of CDs and DVDs in addition to computers, PDAs, and other technological toys.

Hidden in the back is another lounge area equipped with a screen to broadcast movies, play games, or hold conferences. And tucked away from the commotion of the rest of the store is a small, bare corner that sticks out of

the building, affording a lofty view of the rest of Technology Square.

Against another wall is the textbook and supplies store with its own separate information center. Long rows of shelves allow the store to stock far more books than its predecessor, and in the back are the office supplies. This store is hidden behind a wall that showcases the products of the dorm shop, a special selection of products for residents of Georgia Tech that includes everything from laundry baskets to carpets.

Opposite this is another collection of lounge chairs, this one surrounding a floor-to-ceiling, 360-degree gas fireplace for the winter months, along with shelves of science and technical reference books. This setup sits before a wall of windows that overlooks the outdoor plaza in the center of the building. Double doors nearby afford direct access to the new Dupree College of Management complex.

The New Dupree College of Management

Management majors can look forward to working in one of the most technologically advanced buildings at Tech this year. The classrooms come outfitted with multiple dry-erase boards, screens and state-of-the-art projector equipment. Motion sensors flip the lights on as soon as one enters the room, and the lengthy tables are tiered and come with individual, professional-style rolling chairs. Mounted on each table between chairs are small domes, each with two power sockets and two Ethernet ports for laptop users.

Students, employees, and visitors can also enter the College through its front glass double doors that open into a glass-lined lobby. Staircases on either side lead to hallways lined with floor-to-ceiling windows and plush chairs and tables overlooking the central plaza. Also at hand are myriad conference rooms and offices of all sizes.

Rest, Research, and Retail

The other buildings at Technology Square include the Global Learning Center for Continuing Professional Education and Systems Learning and a corresponding hotel, the new Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center.

“The hotel has 250 sleeping rooms, a bar and lounge area, a dining room, and all of their meals are served buffet style, since they’re going to do a lot of conferences there,” said Meyers. “Of course, the hotel is also open for any regular business, but [it] also has a big ballroom and many meeting rooms in addition to the sleeping rooms.”

The Square has also leased 17,000 feet of retail space to a number of companies. For eatery, students can look forward to a St. Charles’ Deli, a Tin Drum Asian Café, a Fifth Street Ribs and Blues, and a Marble Slab Creamery, among others. For students 21 and over, Fifth Street Ribs and the Asian Café will serve alcohol.

Georgia Tech research is also expanding into the new space. The Advanced Technology Development Center and the Technology Square Research Building will both operate out of the Square.

Transportation

Students and visitors to the Square can park in the new parking deck equipped with 1500 spaces and full police security.

A new program called Smart Park will allow students to pay for all-day

parking with their Buzz Card at only \$4.00 per day-half the price of other campus parking-with a \$20.00 permit that will also allow students to park in the deck on evenings and weekends.

As an alternative, a new series of public vehicles, the Tech Trolleys, will be put into service this fall in addition to the Stingers and will run a continuous loop between the former site of the SAC, Technology Square, and the Midtown MARTA Station. Meyers estimates that the Trolleys may run as often as every five minutes during peak hours.

Grand Opening

Although some stores have already opened, the Square will have its grand opening in October when most of the stores have finished moving in. The date is designed to coincide with the weekend of the Tech vs. Maryland football game.

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New director brings New York experience to choral program

By Madhu Adiga

Senior Staff Writer

Yes, Georgia Tech has a music department. Yes, people at Georgia Tech sing. And the Georgia Tech Music Department has a new face. Dr. Jerry Ulrich will join the staff this fall to replace Dr. Bill Caldwell as the Director of Choral Activities at Georgia Tech.

Dr. Ulrich comes to Tech after leaving his position as choral conductor at the LaGuardia High School of Music, Art and Performing Arts (the Fame school) in New York City.

Ulrich grew up in Southern Illinois and got his bachelor's degree at Eastern Illinois University. After getting his Ph.D. at the University of Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, he taught for 17 years at Southampton College and Hofstra University in New York as an adjunct faculty member, and accepted the position at LaGuardia two years ago.

He has enjoyed a rich career as a sought-after composer, arranger and guest conductor, as well as singing for four years with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus under famed director and arranger Robert Shaw.

So why would someone with his resume leave an acclaimed performing arts school to teach choir at... well, Tech?

"I actually hadn't previously planned on leaving LaGuardia, but I saw the opening for a choral director at Georgia Tech advertised, and I became interested," he said. "I've lived in Atlanta before, so I know Georgia Tech's reputation for academic excellence, and I knew Dr. Caldwell."

Ulrich also took an interest in Georgia Tech's plans for a music technology major. "I was very intrigued by the idea of a program that incorporates music with Georgia Tech's technological resources, and I saw a lot of potential and possibility for growth," he said.

He was also interested in coming back to Atlanta, having lived here previously. Even though he enjoyed living in New York and will miss certain things about it, he also was happy to leave what he called a "pressure cooker environment." He said, "I remember coming back to Atlanta and asking for directions on campus, and I thought, 'Is everyone this nice?'"

While vying for the position, Ulrich got the chance to come to campus and work briefly with all three of Tech's choirs: the chorale, the chamber choir and the men's glee club.

When asked what he thought of the ensembles, he said, "one thing that really stood out to me was the student autonomy. I think there's a real strength in the ownership these students take of the choral groups, and I'm very excited

about it. This is something new to me and something I definitely plan to capitalize on.”

Sure, but how do they sound? How does one go from teaching an ensemble of focused, formally trained vocal majors to directing a group of science and engineering students who run the gamut of musical experience?

“The real trick is that choral music is by nature a pedestrian art,” said Ulrich.

“It’s a challenge to work with people who have varying levels of experience, from the guy who’s been playing piano for eight years and is really serious about his music, to the guy who’s never read music before and just knows that he ‘likes to sing.’”

To handle this, Ulrich draws upon his own interesting background. It’s hard to imagine, but the poised, nationally respected conductor got his musical start in a ragtag garage rock band, with only his wits, guts, guitar and amp to guide him.

“I had pretty much no formal training until my sophomore year of college, so I came in with a real passion and naivete. I have the degree now, which is the only difference,” said Ulrich.

Ulrich does not view the difference in experience levels within the chorale as an impediment, but rather sees it for the fun it can offer.

“I’m there to speak to musicians, but I like the innocence and the passion of the kid who just wants the choral experience.”

This year, he plans on diversifying the traditional choral repertoire. “I noticed what a large international population Georgia Tech has, and yet I don’t see that mirrored in the choral department,” said Ulrich. He plans on doing music from Korea, Venezuela, India and other countries, as well as incorporating more traditional chamber music.

“I would like to program music that hits all cultures, and hopefully appeal to all cultures in student recruitment,” said Ulrich. “There’s so much in our world that divides us, but vocal music is so international.”

Overall, Ulrich is very excited to work at Tech. He believes that all three ensembles have a well-crafted choral sound.

“The students I’ve seen here are bright and so engaged in the process. They’re ready to learn and interested in learning.”

It's not just the freshman fifteen anymore: America is fat

By Joshua Cuneo
Senior Staff Writer

[Editor's Note: This article is reprinted, with minor modifications, from the July 11 issue of the Technique.]

Ask any student about obesity trends in the United States, and they'll readily tell you that they're on the rise. People are fat. Two recent studies released by the Center of Disease Control reported that the number of US adults that may be classified as obese according to their body mass index are 20.9 percent and 30 percent, a jump from corresponding values of 12.0 percent and 23 percent in the early 1990s. These skyrocketing obesity rates have caught the nation's attention and pulled our entire modern lifestyle into question.

Georgia Tech, with its young, active student body, would seem to be safe from this public health crisis. According to a study conducted by the Wellness Center during the Spring of 2001, however, 30 percent of Georgia Tech students think that they are overweight or obese, a trend consistent with the national data. No data measuring the actual percentage of overweight or obese students is available.

This conclusion shatters common assumptions about life at Georgia Tech. How can a campus with a young population with high metabolisms, a well-stocked and well-frequented student athletic complex and myriad athletics and intramurals possibly be experiencing a severe obesity problem?

"Students here are more academically geared and engineering geared so they're not as likely to seek out that kind of information," explained Molly Wray, a health educator at the Wellness Center. "Students are studying a lot, sitting in front of a computer a lot, [and] a lot of students pull all-nighters studying and doing projects, so physical activity's probably the last thing on their mind."

That fits the data presented in the Wellness Center report. Of the students surveyed, 30 percent participated in no vigorous physical activity for a week preceding the survey, and 43 percent participated in no moderate physical activity during the same time period. Only 27 percent were enrolled in a physical education course and 33 percent had participated on a college intramural sports team.

"In my opinion, [the SAC is] not a state-of-the-art workout facility," said Wray, "but I think when they have the new one built, it's going to be great." Also, she said, there are no exercise service programs, no certified trainers, and the aerobics program requires a fee, which puts financially strapped students at a disadvantage.

As for nutrition, only 6 percent of the students surveyed reported that they

consumed the requisite five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day and 37 percent ate three or more meals per day, whereas 82.5 percent reported that they consumed one or more fast-food meals a week, not to mention the widespread consumption of one of the most fattening foods available: alcohol.

Aside from the time pressures that encourage students to seek faster foods, Wray also blamed the offerings at the dining halls and the Food Court. “The dining services are self-supportive...so they’re going to sell what will sell, which is pizza, French fries...,” she said. “We’re going against big giants like the Coke and Pepsi people. They have millions and billions of dollars to advertise every year, and public health doesn’t have that kind of money...”

It’s a classic catch-22 situation. Because healthier alternatives don’t generate as much profit, they’re more expensive, which further discourages students from purchasing them.

Also at fault are the computer-enhanced media supermodels and traditional societal expectations that pressure men into maintaining a rippling musculature and women into a perfect hourglass figure.

Even in college, said Wray, “Women get attention from guys based on how they look, and so I think that’s reinforcing some of the messages they’ve been receiving [from the media].” Many men face a similar difficulty, she said, and they end up working out to the point of obsession. The problem is also worsened in the Greek organizations, due to their appearance-driven culture and competitiveness. “I know that when...Greek Week [comes along], I have a lot of students coming in for body fat checks. They’re really trying to crash diet right then.”

To compound the problem, the prevalence of fattening foods and supersized meals conflicts with the ideals propagated by the media, creating a tailspin of confusion and frustration that often leads to eating disorders, a commonality at Tech among both men and women.

These are the situations that HPS 1040, the requisite health class, guards students against, but Wray feels that the one course isn’t sufficient to cover these topics adequately. “I think it’s very difficult to have just one class covering health. I have a whole degree in that, because there’s so many different things to cover,” said Wray. “I think Tech is at a disadvantage because there aren’t majors...like nutrition and wellness. I think that sometimes things like wellness and health are pushed to the wayside. I think we need to focus on the overall person being healthy.”

Wray said that a lack of sufficient information is part of Georgia Tech’s weight problem.

“Students here aren’t quite as aware of what are healthy foods, what can we do for physical activity, what can we do to keep ourselves healthy,” said Wray. “A lot of people think that this won’t happen to me now... The freshmen just come to college and just eat whatever they want.”

And those students that are interested in losing weight are often misinformed. Wray and her colleagues frown on popular low-fat diets, for instance, insisting that certain fats are essential nutrients.

Fats have earned a negative stigma in the United States since the low-fat movement of the early 1990s. Since then, Americans have consumed more low-fat or nonfat foods, but many products substitute extra calories without

the consumer realizing it. Diets are more balanced in Europe, where the health benefits of unsaturated fats are better understood, and Europeans consume smaller meals, made more filling with healthier fats.

Even worse are the diet pills and the other overnight weight loss claims made by advertisers. "People...want a quick fix," said Wray. "I think people think of [maintaining a healthy lifestyle] as really hard, so they don't even want to try at all. It's part of our culture. We want a pill for everything. [It's] impatience." To fill the information void, Wray and her colleagues have made a pointed effort to get the right materials out to the student body.

They hand out information pamphlets regularly, invite guests such as a dietician who dined at the Britain dining hall last month and lectured on nutritious choices, practice environmental intervention to encourage walking, biking, and consumption of more fruits, and hold lectures in classes and Greek organizations, among other things.

Wray herself conducts nutrition analysis with students free of charge to help them improve their dietary intake, and Wray credits her staff for encouraging the recent ban on smoking in all of the campus dormitories.

Health and behavior are complicated, however, so "there's only so much we can do," and she wishes that she could intervene sooner.

Ultimately, she said, when it comes to maintaining good health, "it's really based on how we value ourselves. Do we value ourselves based on what we look like, or is it who we are on the inside, or is it how much we succeed?"