I’m pleased to welcome you to 10th anniversary FOCUS weekend. From a rather modest beginning with 40-some students a decade ago, FOCUS has grown to what you see here today – nearly 300 of the brightest minority college juniors in the United States. And we are delighted to have you at Georgia Tech for this special event.

The reason FOCUS has become so successful is because everyone at Georgia Tech gives it their support, beginning with me personally, through the deans, the faculty, the staff, the African-American graduate students, and even our alumni. And I want to say a special word of welcome to the dozens of alumni who hold graduate degrees from Georgia Tech and who have come back today from all across the nation to join in this celebration.

This special weekend commemorates the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr., that black and white children would join hands, and that the descendents of slaves and the descendents of slave-holders would sit down at the table together. But the goal of FOCUS is to do more than remember the dream. We want to make that dream a reality by encouraging each one of you to take your rightful place at the table and prepare yourselves for leadership.

We live in a time of incredible opportunity for educated minorities. Today’s global economy makes business and industry eager for diversity. And as our society becomes ever more technological, it will increasingly turn to those with a technological education to become leaders. If you don’t believe me, just ask any of the Georgia Tech alumni who are here this weekend. They will tell you what graduate education has meant in their lives.

If you are interested in coming to Georgia Tech, and we hope you are, the people you meet and the friends you make this weekend will get you started on that journey. About 30 percent of the college juniors who participate in FOCUS, come back to Georgia Tech a year and a-half later to enroll as graduate students. And about 30 percent of our African-American graduate student body is composed of students who participated in FOCUS.

What’s more, FOCUS students have an outstanding graduation rate. The vast majority who enroll at Georgia Tech, go on to complete their degrees, helping to make this university a national leader in graduating African-Americans.
So we consider this special weekend to be the start of a very successful experience for you as individual students and for us as an institution. And we are committed to making Georgia Tech a place where minorities are welcome and diversity is valued.

Others of you may decide that Georgia Tech is not a good fit for you, and we urge each of you to pursue graduate studies at another university. Some of the alumni who are with us this weekend are on the faculty of other outstanding universities, and you may want to seek them out. Whatever university is right for you, our nation needs your talents and ideas and endeavors. We need the special perspective you will bring as the African-American leaders of tomorrow. So please pursue graduate studies, if not here at Georgia Tech, then at another university.

Again, welcome. We are glad you’re here. And we hope you are having a wonderful weekend, learning and planning for graduate education, and celebrating the life and vision of Martin Luther King, Jr. here in the city of his birth.