Good evening. It is a pleasure to meet and speak with the members of the Executive Round Table. There are few campus entities devoted to preparing students for future leadership. Even fewer that collaborate with both industry and faculty to achieve that end. Executive Round Table does both, and I would like to express my appreciation to all of you for making the time and commitment to this worthwhile collaboration.

My topic tonight derives from a question asked by a student following my State of the Institute Address last fall. The question addressed a fundamental issue for the future of Georgia Tech. The student asked, “What does your administration want to do about improving campus community?” After giving an answer to the question, I found it remained with me like a tune that sticks in your mind.
As I turned the question over and over, it seemed there was more to it than I assumed when I answered it for the student at the meeting. It struck me that other questions had to be answered before I really understood the issues. E.g.,

1. What is campus community? Who is involved?
2. Did we ever have it, and if so, how did we lose it?
3. Why is it important, given that our primary missions revolve around professional education?
4. If you want to improve it, what is involved?
5. Given that Georgia Tech has very competitive students with diverse origins and ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, can we expect to create campus community?

Let's begin from the beginning. Webster's dictionary defines community as:
1. People living in the same district or city under the same laws.
2. A group of animals or plants living together.
3. A group of people living together and having interests and work in common; as a COLLEGE COMMUNITY.

When the student asked the question that triggered my thoughts, I suspect she meant the latter definition of community. Now, the word college is derived from the Latin “collegium,” which means community or society. So it seems that if we assume our Institute is a college, then the word community is inherent in it. Taking some liberties with the definitions we have heard, I would say that a campus community is a college campus where people can set aside their differences and get to know each other, where they can work together amicably to resolve day to day problems, where they can help solve problems within the neighborhoods where they
reside, and where through common experiences they form lasting friendships and relationships.

It seems to me that if we are to have campus community it has to involve all of the constituencies - students, faculty, staff and administrators.

Now, let me share with you some historical insights as a former student here at Tech. Thirty years ago when I attended Georgia Tech as both an undergraduate and master's student, I felt very comfortable on our campus, that is, part of a community. After a first year of searching for a sense of the place, I enjoyed being here. I had friends from my coop classes, my fraternity, and through my involvement in civil engineering professional activities. In each case, we enjoyed doing things to help a common cause that was larger than our individual interests. E.g, working to see our fraternity do well in the IFC competition for best
fraternity. Remember too, that Tech and Atlanta were smaller and friendlier places then and Tech had fewer majors. We had fewer students per faculty, and many of the faculty did not live far from campus. There were bonding factors for the students in that everybody worked hard and we all had survived drownproofing. The student population had its diversity, but not what it is today. The small size of Tech and Atlanta, the more intimate relations with the faculty, the commonality of the challenges we faced, and the relative homogeniety of the student population probably made it simpler for us to be what might be called a community.

Today, that sense of community has changed. I won’t say that it’s completely gone—just that it’s changed. And it is almost inevitable it would since we are much larger, we have a higher student faculty ratio, our faculty live widely dispersed in a city of over 3,000,000 people, we have a wider variety of
majors, and we have a more heterogeneous student body

Today, there is less one big community than an amalgamation of small communities. For example, there is a strong sense of community between Greek students, between minority students, between student athletes, between co-ops, and between graduate students in specific programs. However, these students do not feel the same bond outside of their individual groups. There is less Institutional sense of community and perhaps this is what my student questioner was alluding to.

We should also note that the motivations of our students and their orientations are largely towards engineering, science, architecture and business careers, careers that are highly focused. In a survey of this year’s entering freshmen, 100 percent of our freshmen responded that they were attending college,
and Tech in particular, in order to get a better job. In addition, 91 percent said they were attending college in order to make more money.

Also our students know that there are not automatic rewards for broadly based Institute-wide service. E.g., students own interests are well served by work done for a fraternity or a sorority. The same cannot be said now for community service done in the name of Georgia Tech.

I am tempted to say that the lack of overall unity even reflects the times that we live in, the lack of civility in our society, and the complexity and large size of our city and the Institute. But, I am an unfailing optimist. I personally believe that campus community can be achieved, for sure beyond where we are today.
This brings us back to the remaining questions I posed at the beginning of my remarks: Should we seek increased campus community, if so, what is needed to be done and at what price, and finally, what can be done to improve incentives to work towards the goal?

Let's look at what some others are saying and doing about it. Logic dictates that habits learned while in college will carry over to one's professional life. You could even make the argument that Tech is failing its students due to the lack of emphasis on community involvement. For example, writer J.A. Rosenkrantz states, "Your education has been a failure no matter how much it has done for your mind, if it has failed to open your heart."

Former president of Brown University Howard R. Swearer states that community service and education should be linked. "We want Brown to be a
community of compassionate people, involved in serious intellectual pursuits, but never divorced from one of the principal purposes of education, to prepare young people for responsible citizenship."

Today, Brown students complete their academic studies and build campus unity through community service projects. The Swearer Center for Public Service provides students with opportunities to: increase their community involvement and strengthen their leadership skills through direct service; connect community-based work with academic study; and build meaningful partnerships between the University and local, national, and international communities.

Duke University has also selected community service as a means to bring the campus together. Students are encouraged to participate in at least one community service activity per year and projects range from community health outreach to spring
break service projects to a summer community service internship program that pays students to work in the community.

If we were to assume we should work on the issue of campus community at Tech as others are doing, then what are the options to achieve the end? One method is through sharing experience in campuswide cultural activities. Performing arts events span cultural and ethnic differences and educate in a positive and nonthreatening environment. One event we are working on expanding in is the Spring Arts Festival. It is potentially one tool for bringing the campus together. However, currently, the Arts Festival has yet to be embraced by the entire campus community.

Another method is through community service as is being practiced at Duke and Brown. Working shoulder to shoulder with others from Georgia Tech
in the interest of our community and others less fortunate is a way to bridge culture gaps. We have a good foundation to build on. The Techwood Tutorial program provides tutoring and mentoring for area students and has been in existence for more than 30 years (still no student from Techwood Homes has ever gone to Ga Tech). Other programs include MOVE, Partners in Education, and Best Buddies. In addition, our Community Service Center also refers students interested in community service to various agencies in need. However, community service at Tech is somewhat disjointed. It does not bring the entire campus together. It is not connected to the academic sphere.

Part of that reason may be that, unlike Brown, community service is not incorporated into the mission of our university. In addition, community service is not clearly rewarded.
Georgia Tech does very well at preparing students for the workforce and a career—therefore fulfilling the expectations of our students. My question for you today is this: does this prepare them for life as citizens or as leaders? Related questions are: Should we continue upon our present course or should we endeavor to instill a sense of heightened campus community within the Institute? And, if the answer is yes, how should we go about it, how should we incentivize it, and is the effort worth it?

Thank you.