

What: Academic Decathlon
When: April 20, 3 p.m.
Type of remarks: Welcome
Length: 2-3 minutes
Who: National academic competition featuring state winners. Each team consists of nine students—3A+ average students, 3 B+ students, and 3 C students.

Good afternoon. On behalf of Georgia Tech, it is my pleasure to welcome you to Atlanta and Georgia Tech.

For those of you who are not familiar with Georgia Tech, you soon will be. This summer, we will act as the Olympic Village during the Summer Games. We are also hosting athletic venues for the Olympic sports of boxing, swimming, diving, and water polo.

The Olympics will undoubtedly help Georgia Tech become more recognized in the athletic area. However, it is our academic endeavors that should not be overlooked. We are one of the nation's top-ranked universities. Overall, U.S. News and World Report ranks us among the top ten public universities in the country. When individual programs are considered, many of our programs rank in the top 20, the top 10, and the top 5—including two programs that are ranked number one in the country.

Although we will host Olympic athletes from around the world in a few short months, due to your academic prowess, your presence on our campus is more gratifying to us—and it is an honor to have so many intelligent young minds visit Georgia Tech.

It is altogether fitting that Georgia Tech host both the Academic Decathlon and the 1996 Olympic Games. We all have much in common.

Both the Olympic and Academic Decathlon events encourage participants to achieve new levels of excellence. Both events take dedication, perseverance, and hard work. At Georgia Tech, our students also know the meaning of those three words.

Likewise the participants in both the Academic Decathlon and the Olympics and the students at Georgia Tech are the best of the best. You and the Olympic athletes have proven yourself through competition and now compete on the highest level. Georgia Tech students have proven themselves through laboratory work, test scores, and team projects.

Your theme this year is appropriate for both the Academic Decathlon and the Olympics. Cooperation and competition is the very essence of the Olympic experience.

There are some major differences between you and Olympic athletes. Legendary Olympic track star Jesse Owens once said about the Olympics: "It's a lifetime of training—and it's over in 10 seconds."

For many Olympic athletes, that statement is true. You may see the really good ones again—endorsing tennis shoes or appearing on a box of Wheaties, but for many, after the Olympics are over, the skills, talents, and abilities they have nurtured, are of no use to them in their next career.

As participants in the Academic Decathlon, your training will not go unrewarded. Whether you win a medal during this competition or not, the study skills you have learned and the innate intelligence you have nurtured will stand you in good stead throughout the rest of your life.

The father of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin once said: “The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning, but taking part...The essential thing in life is not conquering, but fighting well.”

I think his statement has meaning for all of us. During the upcoming competition, not all of you will be able to claim victory, but all—because of your participation—will be able to say you fought well. Likewise, not all of the Olympic athletes can bring home the gold medal, however, they—like you—have the satisfaction of knowing they competed at the highest level.

In conclusion, I’d like to congratulate you on your achievement in reaching the national level of the United States Academic Decathlon. I’d also like to urge you to continue in your quest to excel—in all areas of your life—especially in the all-important area of intellectual curiosity.

Thank you and good luck.