(Dr. Clough) Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Will everyone please stand for the reflection by Mr. Carlton O. Parker, director of the YMCA, and remain standing for our national anthem.

(Carlton Parker) Reflection

(Brass Ensemble) National Anthem

(Dr. Clough) Please be seated.

Once again, good morning. It is my pleasure to welcome everyone to Georgia Tech’s summer commencement.

Approximately 107 years ago, Georgia Tech held its very first commencement. On that day in 1890, just two men graduated, obtaining undergraduate degrees in mechanical engineering.

Throughout the 107 years in between the Class of 1997 and Tech’s first graduating class, thousands of other students have accepted a diploma from a Georgia Tech president. Although much has changed in those years, I imagine the feelings of each student who graduates are much the same. Then, as now, I expect most would admit to feeling some pride, elation, and relief...as well as perhaps a bit of sadness.

Besides your emotion upon “getting out,” you also share something else with those who have gone before you. You share the common bond of the Georgia Tech educational experience. As part of this, you share common traits of perseverance, grit, intelligence, and drive. Character traits which have helped you survive at Georgia Tech and arrive at a culmination of your educational experience—commencement.

Although you do have much in common with other Georgia Tech classes, the Class of 1997 is unique in
Georgia Tech’s history.

Some interesting facts about your Class and fellow graduates includes:

- The Class of 1997 has the highest number of degrees awarded to African Americans in the Institute’s history as well as the second highest number of female graduates;
- The Class of 1997 can also be proud of your Olympic participation and your role in crafting the Student Honor Code.
- Finally, the Class of 1997 holds the somewhat unique distinction of being the class whose members in one night stole the “T”—and then put it back just to say it could be done.

As you can see, you have much to be proud of. However, the pride you feel today, should extend to others in today’s audience. Throughout your Georgia Tech experience, you were supported—and yes, sometimes put up with—by parents, friends, and other family. Parents, will you please stand so our graduates can show their thanks? (Lead applause.)

Another group was also instrumental to your success: the Georgia Tech faculty. Although the naturalist W.H. Auden once defined professors as individuals who “talk in someone else’s sleep,” I think you’ll agree that your professors worked hard to help you lay a foundation for a successful future. Faculty, will you please stand and let us recognize and thank you. (Lead applause).

Of course, those who deserve the most recognition are those who graduate today. Those who entered this room as students and who will leave as Georgia Tech alumni. Would all of you please stand so that we may recognize you and your achievement? (Lead applause)

(Pause)
It is now my pleasure to introduce the summer commencement graduation speaker. Although I always enjoy the commencement speaker, I will confess that I enjoy the summer speaker the most. Because during the summer, the speech is traditionally given by the winner of that year’s Distinguished Professor Award, the highest award given to a faculty member at Georgia Tech.

This year’s Distinguished Professor is a man who has made an indelible impression upon Georgia Tech. Dr. Charles Eckert is well recognized campuswide for his scholarly leadership and achievements, his teaching ability, and his contributions to the personal and professional development of Georgia Tech students.

Internationally, Dr. Eckert is known as “the father of supercritical fluids,” for his breakthrough work in molecular interaction and chemical processes; however, here on campus he is known by students and faculty alike as Chuck.

In fact, Chuck is so well esteemed by his students that come November he is allowing several of his former students to throw him a bachelor party in honor of his upcoming wedding.

Chuck, that takes courage and the line that keeps coming to my head is one from some movie, maybe one of the Terminator movies, and goes something like this: “Be Afraid. Be Very, Very Afraid.”

On campus, Chuck is the J. Erskine Love Jr. Institute Professor in the School of Chemical Engineering, and holds a joint appointment in the School of Chemistry. In addition to teaching courses, directing student theses, and conducting seminars and research projects, he also directs the
A teacher and scholar for more than 30 years, Chuck received his B.S. and M.S. from MIT and his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. He came to Georgia Tech in 1989 from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he headed the Chemical Engineering Department for six years.

A prolific author, Dr. Eckert has authored or co-authored nearly 200 research papers, books, and monographs, and has presented more than 300 invited lectures. He has directed more than 60 Ph.D. theses and approximately 20 of his students have followed his footsteps into academia, as faculty, chaired professors, department heads, and deans.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Georgia Tech’s 1997 Distinguished Professor and groom to be, Dr. Charles Eckert......

(President’s Remarks)

Once again, I would like to offer my personal congratulations to the Class of 1997. You have worked hard—and one of your rewards, is that today—and all the days and years afterward, you may say with pride that you graduated from the Georgia Institute of Technology.

As a Georgia Tech graduate, you’ll find that your degree will help open many doors. As a Tech grad myself, I have found that to be true throughout my career.

It especially didn’t hurt when I interviewed for the job
I now hold.

The respect you will be accorded has been earned; I doubt there are any of you out there who would say that obtaining your degree was easy. I know it took me many long hours and hard work to obtain mine. In that respect, Georgia Tech hasn’t changed much.

There is a common saying in Japan that goes something like this: “That which is difficult, is sweet to recall.”

While it may be a bit early yet for you to recall all of your memories of Georgia Tech as “sweet”, I can assure you the day will come when you will wonder how the years went by so fast and you will want to return to campus to recollect and reminisce about the good times you experienced here.

As an alumnus, I have done my share of reminiscing about my “good old days” on campus. And, as much as I’d like to tell you about afternoons spent slicing golf balls from the roof of my fraternity toward the Hill, instead I believe it is one of my obligations to help prepare you for life on the outside by providing you with the answer to the most commonly asked, and singularly uninformed, question about Georgia Tech.

(Pause)

The question goes something like this: “Why isn’t Georgia Tech called a university? After all, most schools are.”

When you hear this question, above all, refrain from losing your temper. After all, it is a step in the right direction that the question is being asked in the first place and that the individual asking it is not referring to us as the dreaded and nonexistent Georgia Tech University.
Instead, smile when asked the question and say the following:

“Universities are defined as institutions where knowledge accumulates....the freshmen come in with a little, the seniors go out with none, so the knowledge accumulates. And, since Georgia Tech seniors graduate with more knowledge than when they entered, we cannot, in good faith, be called a university.”

If the individual asking the question still needs clarification, tell them to visit Athens and they’ll no doubt soon figure out the difference.

Your Institute education has well prepared you for a successful future. Indeed the knowledge you are taking out will render you well prepared to meet and exceed the challenges of the 21st century.

However, success in life is not guaranteed by a degree or having worked hard to get one. This is just the start. In his book, The Road Ahead, Bill Gates states, “Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can’t lose. And it’s an unreliable guide to the future.”

Although he is talking about high-tech business products, not students, I think his quote can easily be applied to people. Continued success comes not to those who wait, but those who grow. Those who continue to learn and continue to overcome challenges.

As a Georgia Tech graduate, I hope you have learned to enjoy the challenge. I hope you take from your Georgia Tech experience resiliency, tenacity, creativity, a love of learning, and a willingness to make the hard decisions that life will invariably bring.

Finally, as a Tech graduate, I hope you will use your
intelligence, gifts, and talents to make a difference. In this year alone, three Tech alums have manned space flights, a current student has won the U.S. Amateur Golf Tournament, a recent alum is on track to win the American League Rookie of the Year Award and has already made it the All Star game in his first year, and another alum has been recognized as the winner of the senior level Entrepreneur of the Year Award for the southeast and is up for the same at the national level.

All have used their Tech experience to pursue and gain their dreams.

I hope you do the same.

Thank you.