

REMARKS BY GEORGIA TECH PRESIDENT G. WAYNE CLOUGH  
Freshman Convocation, August 20, 2000

I'm pleased to add my voice to the chorus and say welcome to Georgia Tech. My role today is to give you a little feel for the history and traditions of this great institution. As to history, I am lucky to actually share some of it. I matriculated at Tech in 1959 as a freshman. After six years I completed an undergraduate degree as a coop student and a master's degree, much to the surprise of many and even myself.

I came to Tech as a student who grew up in rural South Georgia and was among the first in my family to receive a college degree. My aspirations were to just get a B.S. degree, but Tech helped me understand there was more to life than that, and I later attended U.C. Berkeley to obtain my Ph.D. degree. Georgia Tech launched me on a fulfilling career in engineering, teaching and research that ultimately led to another direct link in my history to Georgia Tech's when I returned as president in 1994.

There is no question that I did not expect to have this wonderful opportunity when I was a student here, and for sure, most of the faculty who taught me did not anticipate seeing me again, much less as president. But that is the way life works if you keep at it. Good things happen if you work hard and use what Tech teaches you.

Incidentally, the good news about being president is that now I get the best seats for football and basketball games, something all of you might aspire to! By the way, so some of you can see what this is like, the first five of you who send me an email today will get an invitation to the President's Suite for the Central Florida game.

But, Georgia Tech's history does go back well before I was here. Georgia Tech was born on October 13, 1885, when the governor of Georgia signed legislation creating a technological school for the state. \$65,000 was provided to build the school and pay for its first year of operation.

Undeterred by those slim rations, Georgia Tech opened its doors on October 5, 1888 to 129 students, all of them mechanical engineering majors. The campus consisted of two buildings – the Academic Building, which we now call the Tech Tower and which is still the heart of campus today, and a shop building between the Tech Tower and Cherry Street, which later burned down. There was no housing – students lived in boarding houses around town.

Life at Tech in those early days was a little different than today. The students, who were all white males, wore suits and ties to class where they spent half the day studying

math, physics, chemistry, mechanics, drawing, and English. The other half of the day was spent working in wood and metal shops.

Other things, however, haven't changed much: In 1893 Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia met for their first football game in Athens. Tech won by a score of 28-6. UGA complained that the officiating wasn't fair and threw rocks at the Tech team as they ran to board the train back to Atlanta.

That team was not the Yellow Jackets, by the way. Our earliest teams were the "Techs" or the "Engineers," Then came the "Golden Tornado." In the early days, it was the fans who were called the "yellow jackets," because they wore yellow to show their team loyalty.

Football introduced Georgia Tech to the nation. We were barely 20 years old when John Heisman led the team to national prominence and later had the Heisman Trophy named for him. About the same time, in 1912, Tech became the fourth university in the world to begin a cooperative program. Today we have the largest voluntary co-op program in the nation.

Of course, no history of Georgia Tech would be complete without mention of George P. Burdell, Tech's world-famous mythical student. He was created in 1927 by a quick-thinking student who was given two application forms by mistake, and he has been here ever since. George has received more degrees from Tech than any student. Other schools have gotten to know him; he has been accepted at the business schools of Yale and Harvard. A few years ago, George was voted as the best myth in all of college history, but here on campus, we know myth is reality and George lives on.

By the time Georgia Tech reached the midpoint of our first century, we had evolved into a noteworthy southern regional university. During the 1940s we became the sixth university in the nation to own a state-of-the-art AC network calculator – a rudimentary computer that filled a large room. Sponsored research broke the \$1 million mark in the late 1940s, and in 1950 we awarded our first PhD degree.

At the age of 50, Tech's full-time degree enrollment topped 5,400, and the American Society for Engineering Education ranked us first in the South and fourth in the nation in engineering enrollment. However, our campus capacity was for half that many students, so classes began at 7:00 in the morning and continued past 10:00 at night. It was a little better when I was here, but we did have Saturday classes. You haven't lived until you have had a calculus class at 8 a.m. on Saturday. You will find that the schedule has improved somewhat since those days.

The fifties brought a significant change in the culture of Georgia Tech. In the fall of 1952, Marilyn Monroe appeared on the cover of *Look* magazine, wearing a Georgia Tech sweater and celebrating the admission of the first two women students. In the sixties, Georgia Tech took the next step toward diversity, becoming the first university in the Deep South to integrate voluntarily.

Today, roughly 30 percent of our students are women and 30 percent are minority. Someday before too long, Tech will be like my other alma mater, Berkeley, where there is no "majority" and no minority.

By the 1960s when I was here, Georgia Tech had become a very good regional school with about 7,000 students. We had a version of freshman convocation back then, and I remember only one thing I was told: look at the person on our left, then at the person on our right. By the time graduation rolled around, we were told, only one of the three of us would be left.

The rationale for this gracious introduction to life as a freshman was related to a former time when students came to Tech without the best qualifications. Since then, the admissions process has gotten much more rigorous. You are the brightest class of freshmen we have ever admitted to Georgia Tech. I stand here today and say to you that I hope to hand every single one of you a Georgia Tech diploma.

But I echo Sara and JR in encouraging you to reach out... to get help when you need it, to take advantage of academic support services, to form study groups and build networks, to get involved in campus organizations and activities. As a freshman I struggled because I did not know how to study. Only after I sought help did my student experience turn around. Also, explore your curricula alternatives at Tech. While engineering is the biggest major, we have some great majors in a wide variety of other fields.

Over the years since my student days, Georgia Tech has grown and matured into a research university that today ranks among the nation's best. Our student body now tops 14,000, and outstanding students are at the core of our mission and the heart of our endeavors.

While we now rival schools like MIT and Cal Tech in the research lab and classroom, they leave a little to be desired when it comes to athletics. I'll put our football team and our men's and women's basketball teams against theirs any day!

Last year we were ranked in the top 20 in football and number one in golf and baseball. We watched the thrilling performances of Academic All Americans Carol Clevenger in volleyball and Bryce Molder in golf. We held our collective breath when quarterback Joe Hamilton came within a whisker of winning the Heisman Trophy, and we celebrated when third baseman Mark Teixeira won the Dick Howser Trophy as collegiate baseball's best player and was also named an Academic All American.

In our early days of scrambling for resources and making machinery for private industry, Georgia Tech developed a practical, entrepreneurial mindset that still characterizes us today. We rank fourth in the nation in industry-sponsored research and first in technology transfer, which translates the discoveries of the lab into marketable products. Sponsored research, which squeaked past the \$1 million mark 50 years ago, now exceeds \$280 million.

The hopes and expectations for Georgia Tech are still the same today as they were when Tech was founded more than 100 years ago – that this university and our graduates will lead the way into a new age, one that will be dependent in every way on technology. Never has Georgia Tech been better positioned to help society and never has a Georgia Tech degree, be it in engineering, in the sciences, in business, in international affairs, in history of technology, been more valuable.

And Georgia Tech alumni are at the helm of some of today's hottest high-tech firms – Chris Klaus founded Internet Security Systems in his Tech dorm room... Pat Nettles' company Ciena has steadily risen on the Nasdaq while other tech stocks were tanking and now rivals Cisco... *Fortune* magazine consistently ranks Deborah Willingham, vice president at Microsoft, as one America's most powerful women... Dave Dorman is CEO of Concert, a new, \$7 billion global communications venture based here in Atlanta.

I've been telling you about Georgia Tech's past, but our most exciting days are yet to come. We are a world leader in emerging interdisciplinary fields like biotechnology, nano-technology, human-computer interaction, and sustainable technology. We are a leader in designing innovative facilities for our students and faculty, and you will spend the next few years detouring around numerous construction sites on campus. We are stepping into new global arenas, with international branch campuses, degrees, and partnerships.

You have chosen a university with rich and wonderful traditions and history, and you have become a Georgia Tech Yellow Jacket at one of the most exciting times in all of that history. So plunge in, get involved, and make the most of the next four years. I guarantee you'll have the time of your life, and your life will never be the same.