REMARKS BY GEORGIA TECH PRESIDENT G. WAYNE CLOUGH
CETL Teaching Fellows Luncheon, April 8, 1999

Thank you, Dave, for that kind introduction.

Even though I’ve moved into administration, I am still at heart a teacher. This afternoon I’ll be back in the classroom, guest-teaching a class. So I’m really glad to have this opportunity to commend you for your desire to improve your own teaching, and thank you for the contribution you make to Georgia Tech’s reputation for excellence in the classroom.

This has been quite a year for Georgia Tech’s Teaching Fellows and the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. A month ago, Dave McGill and I went to Washington, D.C. to accept the Theodore M. Hesburgh Award from TIAA-CREF at the annual meeting of the American Council on Education. The Hesburgh Award is the nation’s top award for enhancing undergraduate teaching and learning.

There we were, in a huge ballroom with 1,200 educators from colleges and universities all across the nation. I was up at the head table with Elizabeth Dole, who was the guest speaker, and when I accepted the Hesburgh Award on your behalf, Georgia became only the 9th university in the nation to receive this prestigious award. It was pretty heady stuff for a tech school.

I was not there because of anything I did. I was there because the alumni of Georgia Tech know that a good teacher can change your life forever. And I want to recognize and thank George Stewart, who led his class in its efforts to endow the Teaching Fellows program for junior faculty. Georgia Tech won the Hesburgh Award because the class of ’69 contributed $165,000 to create that endowment, which today is worth three-quarters of a million dollars.

I was also there because all of you understand the importance of good teaching. Georgia Tech won the Hesburgh Award because you took the initiative to improve your teaching skills, and collectively you make undergraduate education at Georgia Tech more alive, more interactive, and more intriguing.

In addition to our junior Teaching Fellows, I also want to commend the senior Teaching Fellows who are in the program this quarter. Human beings are creatures of habit; we tend to resist change. That natural resistance is obvious in many a college classroom, where the most remarkable change in the past 100 years has been the replacement of the chalk board with a dry-marker board.

So I am very proud that Georgia Tech has senior faculty members who are still learners themselves… and who want to refresh and update their teaching skills, to incorporate technology and to accommodate the different styles in which students learn today – which have been largely shaped by technology. The $30,000 in prize money we received as part of the award has been put in an endowment to support our program for senior Teaching Fellows.
The Hesburgh Award says that even though we have a focus on technology, even though we are
tremendous research engine, Georgia Tech still excels at its original mission – to educate “a hell
of an engineer” with outstanding undergraduate teaching.

The heart of the education process is in the classroom, in the relationship between the teacher,
the students and the subject matter. The only way to improve education, to raise it to new levels
of excellence, is to do something that enhances that relationship. And for your part, you know
that there is nothing quite like the thrill of seeing your students’ eyes light up as the wheels turn
in their minds.

Beyond giving us outstanding teachers at all levels, the Teaching Fellows programs do
something else that is very important for Georgia Tech. Coming up with fresh, inventive
teaching methods requires you to look critically at the courses you teach, and in the process you
invariably find yourselves looking at the curriculum itself.

To be effective, curriculum has to be continually moving and evolving. It ought to be a little like
a slowly moving caterpillar tread – most of it firmly on the ground, but a little that is old
continually disappearing and a little that is new continually appearing on the forward edge.

The Teaching Fellows program is a mechanism that continuously upgrades and updates Georgia
Tech’s curriculum, helping weed out what has become dated or obsolete and add in the latest
information and ideas.

As Teaching Fellows, you also make a special contribution to Georgia Tech’s growing national
prominence. *U.S. News & World Report* recently came out with a new set of rankings, and
Georgia Tech had the pleasure of seeing our College of Engineering surpass UCal - Berkeley and
move into third place.

I don’t put a lot of stock in any one number in a particular ranking. The things that cause these
rankings to shift can sometimes be a little strange, and you wonder if they really reflect a change
in caliber. What I find useful, is to look at the collective rankings of our various schools and
programs over time, like a series of freeze-frames that taken together give us a sense of how we
are progressing.

When you look at Georgia Tech’s rankings in that light, what you see is that many of our schools
and programs have been moving up through their respective categories. In this latest round, for
example, math is up to 12th from 18th; chemical engineering is up to 13th from 15th; electrical
engineering is up to 7th from 10th. When you look at the collective record of our various schools
and programs over several years, most of them are improving and many of them have moved
into the top 15 in the nation. And then it becomes clear that virtually no other university in the
United States has improved as much as Georgia Tech has.

High-caliber faculty are an important factor in our growing national prominence. It is a chicken
and egg sort of thing. National prominence helps you to attract top-drawer faculty, and top-
drawer faculty help you achieve national prominence.
Since the National Science Foundation began the CAREER Award some five years ago to recognize young faculty who show the greatest promise in engineering and science, 33 Georgia Tech faculty have won it. Tech ranks third in the nation by number of CAREER Awards, behind MIT and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. But both of them have much larger faculties than we do, which means that Georgia Tech has the highest concentration of outstanding young faculty of any college or university in the United States.

When world-famous violinist Jascha Heifetz left the glamour of an international performing career to became a professor at UCLA, he explained the move by saying that his old violin master in Russia used to tell him that if he worked hard enough, someday he would be good enough to teach. To him, teaching was the highest calling, and he only undertook it after he considered himself good enough.

As teachers, you are responsible for generating the most critical of all products demanded not only by today’s economy, but also today’s society – the educated citizen. Your mission is to educate the whole person, not just a narrow slice of their intellect. As Senator Sam Nunn told our graduates at a recent commencement, in addition to being a “hell of an engineer,” they also need to become a “hell of a parent,” a “hell of a citizen” and a “hell of a civic volunteer.”

Your dedication to excellent teaching is what will enable Georgia Tech to produce graduates who are prepared and equipped go beyond simply being managers of technology and become the leaders of the next generation. So I’m glad to have this opportunity to join with CETL in recognizing the value of your work and to thank you for your contribution to Georgia Tech.