Good evening, and welcome to Georgia Tech and Focus ’99. We’re glad you’ve joined us for this eighth annual weekend event. We are going to celebrate the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and encourage you to develop your potential as the leaders of tomorrow.

I am especially excited to welcome my good friend Dr. George Campbell to Focus ’99. He is both an outstanding research scholar in physics, and the president and CEO of NACME, Inc., which provides incentives like academic enrichment programs and scholarships for minority students to pursue engineering degrees.

Some fifty years ago, when Martin Luther King, Jr. was a young college student, he wrote, “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.” It was a lesson he learned well. He prepared for leadership with a graduate divinity degree from Crozer Seminary and a Ph.D. from Boston University. His vision for America’s future was inspired by the writings of Thoreau and Ghandi, and his goals and actions were grounded in academic scholarship.

Dr. King combined the education he needed to think intensively and critically with the courage to translate his ideas into action. He was only 34 years old when he led the march on Washington, delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech and won the Nobel Peace Prize. He never lived to see his 40th birthday. But he launched the most sweeping social reform movement America had ever seen, and in the process he changed this nation and the world forever. His words and his example continue to inspire us today, more than three decades after his death.

I was a student here at Georgia Tech during the civil rights movement, and Dr. King’s speeches and accomplishments had a profound effect on me, as they did on many others around me. I watched with pride as this institution became the first public university in Georgia to admit African-American students without a court order. It was the first step in what has become a Georgia Tech tradition of promoting diversity and encouraging minority students.

The new millennium will demand leaders who have been educated in science and technology, and it is essential that minority groups be well represented among them. You are among the brightest and the best this nation has to offer in response to that challenge. You have excelled and earned honors at your respective schools, and I urge each one of you to follow in Dr. King’s footsteps and prepare yourself for leadership with an advanced degree. Graduate school can help you further refine your leadership skills, further develop your potential and further discover the vision that will shape your future.

Specifically, I’d like to urge you to consider Georgia Tech’s graduate programs. As one of the nation’s foremost technological institutions, we have much to offer you.
Georgia Tech ranks among America’s top ten public universities, according to *U.S. News & World Report*. We rank in the top five public institutions in the nation in the percentage of National Achievement Scholars we enroll.

We rank first in the nation in the number of GEM fellows – that’s the National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for Minorities in Engineering – and we rank first in awarding graduate degrees to African Americans in engineering, computer science and mathematics. Here, you will find yourself among a strong cadre of minority graduate students.

If you choose Georgia Tech, you can look forward to excellent instruction, because we rank first in the number of National Science Foundation CAREER Awards, which recognize the best young science and engineering faculty in the country. You can also look forward with confidence to a productive career, because seven out of ten Georgia Tech students already have a job waiting by the time they graduate.

In addition to these academic advantages, Georgia Tech also offers plenty of programs such as The African American Student Union, the Diversity Forum, the National Society of Black Engineers, and hundreds of social activities and clubs, many of them student-initiated.

As you can see, Georgia Tech is committed to educating African American leaders in science and technology. And our success is reflected in a newly released survey, in which the National Society of Black Engineers asked its 7,000 student members to rank their graduate school preferences. Georgia Tech was number one, ahead of a couple of other schools that are also pretty good, like MIT, the University of Michigan and Stanford.

But even if you do not choose Georgia Tech, I encourage you to pursue graduate studies somewhere. We need your intellect, your talents and your leadership to propel this nation forward through the 21st century.

Once again, welcome to Atlanta and to Georgia Tech. I hope this weekend will be enjoyable, informative, and memorable, and I look forward to welcoming many of you again when you return to enroll as graduate students.