I’d like to echo Ellen’s words of welcome and extend my personal congratulations to this year’s inductees into the Engineering Hall of Fame, the Academy of Distinguished Engineering Alumni, and the Council of Outstanding Young Engineering Alumni.

These are exciting times at Georgia Tech. The Institute continues to rank among the top ten public universities in the nation, and the College of Engineering continues to exhibit sticking power among the top five engineering schools in the nation. You have to take these rankings with a grain of salt, but they are a general indicator of how Georgia Tech is perceived and of the direction in which we are moving. And our trend lines are definitely up.

Our strong national reputation is increasingly reflected in activities and events on campus. On Monday we had the first Annual Bourne Poetry Reading at the Ferst Center for the Arts, and it was the largest and most stellar poetry reading ever held in the City of Atlanta. The program included two U.S. poet laureates, the best-selling poet in the United States, a Pulitzer Prize winner, the winner of the National Book Award, and the author of 20 novels, which have been translated into 20 languages. Needless to say, all of the tickets for this event were gone weeks in advance.

Next Friday, we will welcome former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn; Bell South Chairman and CEO Duane Ackerman who also chairs the U.S. Council on Competitiveness; and Floyd Kvamme, co-chair of the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. These nationally prominent leaders are coming to meet with our Georgia Tech Advisory Board for a discussion of the future directions for our growing role in the public policy arena.

An understanding of technology is becoming more essential to wise policy decisions, but a recent study by the national Research Council found that the members of Congress and their staffs know very little about the technology their policy decisions address. So it is not surprising that Georgia Tech is increasingly being called upon to provide advice on public policy.

Georgia Tech’s growing visibility in the humanities and public policy neither runs contrary to our engineering mission, nor does it imply that our commitment to engineering is weakening. What it demonstrates is Georgia Tech’s growing appeal and relevance to a broader range of interests.

As technology becomes more ubiquitous in every aspect of work and life, an understanding of its applications and implications is becoming increasingly important to a wider array of disciplines. Students who don’t major in engineering are increasingly attracted to Georgia Tech by the opportunity to immerse themselves in a technology-oriented environment while studying their chosen discipline.
It works the other direction as well. As technology has imbued virtually every aspect of life, the need for technological leadership has grown. Society is increasingly looking to engineers to assume broader leadership responsibilities. We want to prepare our engineering students for that leadership role by helping them to understand the human dimensions of their work, so that they become adept in creating technology solutions for the social and economic problems we face.

This year we are celebrating the first 50 years of women at Georgia Tech, and that anniversary is an important reminder that as engineering takes on a higher profile and broader leadership responsibilities, we need to make our own ranks more inclusive and representative. Georgia Tech is a national leader in graduating women engineers, and you can see our progress around you and in your program tonight. This is the ninth group to be inducted into the Georgia Tech Engineering Hall of Fame, but Shirley Mewborn is the very first woman. When this evening’s festivities are over, the Hall of Fame will consist of 71 men and Shirley.

The Academy of Distinguished Engineering Alumni represents a somewhat younger generation, so it does a little better. Including the two women inducted tonight, the Academy will have a ratio of one woman for each 25 members. And the four women joining the Council of Outstanding Young Engineering Alumni will bring the ratio for that group to one woman for every four and a half men. As you can see, the younger the group, the higher the proportion of women, reflecting the increasing participation of women at Georgia Tech. But there is more work still to be done.

We live in a time that calls for leaders who can create effective technology and manage it constructively to shape the future. And we believe that Georgia Tech’s strengths and abilities give us a unique opportunity to answer that call with the science, technology, management strategies, public policies and graduates that open the doors to a prosperous, just and sustainable future.

Your careers and accomplishments provide us with role models of engineering leadership as we pursue those goals. We are proud to claim you as alumni, we are grateful for the examples and support you provide, and we are pleased to honor you on this special evening. Congratulations to each one of you.