

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT WAYNE CLOUGH  
Greek Alumni Forum  
Saturday, November 2, 2002

I'm pleased to welcome all of you to this first Greek Alumni Forum at Georgia Tech. We're really glad to have you with us. We hope it will be a time that brings back many good memories, and we also hope to benefit from your suggestions and advice on how to improve Greek life at Georgia Tech.

Greek life at Tech dates back to 1888 – the same year the school opened its doors. At the time, the national climate was not very receptive to fraternities and sororities at public institutions. Many felt that private social organizations had no place on public campuses, and some states banned Greek systems from state-supported colleges and universities. At Georgia Tech, however, the faculty believed that fraternities could be directed toward “worthy purposes” and make a positive contribution to campus life. And by 1922, we had chapters of 16 national fraternities on campus. The first sorority was organized in 1953 – just one year after the first two female students were admitted.

Fraternities and sororities are based on the notion that the bonds of honest friendship can reach beyond individual relationships and even beyond individual life-spans to support and nurture generations of educated, well-rounded leaders. They emphasize common ideals and values, and encourage their members to work together to excel academically, build lifelong friendships, serve the community, develop leadership skills, and achieve personal growth. As a result, many of Georgia Tech's student leaders throughout our history have been Greeks, and many positive contributions have been made to our campus and to the Atlanta community by the Greek system.

As a student, I was a member of a fraternity during the sixties, and by that time fraternities had become the driving force of social life on campus. Dorm space was limited, and the rules of dorm life were strict. The student center had not yet been built, and there was no campus-wide program of student activities. So fraternities, which offered more freedom in the use of alcohol, in relating to the opposite sex, and in avoiding the “in loco parentis” restrictions of the dorms, ruled the social scene. They also held sway over student government, *The Technique*, the Ramblin' Wreck Club, and virtually every other traditional student institution.

However, during the decade of the sixties, college campus were unsettled, with Vietnam War protests, sit-ins, and the like. And what has now become clearer in retrospect is that during this era of unrest, a shift began in the Greek system. The

priority that had been placed on the bonds of friendship, scholarship and leadership gave way to an emphasis on personal freedom and alcohol. Over the years since then, the reputation of the Greek system declined even as their insurance premiums increased.

Today we again have a climate of doubt about the role of Greeks on the campuses of our colleges and universities. A number of colleges and universities have recently banned Greek organizations from their campus entirely, including Alfred University, and Bowdoin, Colby, Santa Clara, Waynesburg, Williams, Amherst, and Middlebury colleges. The chairman of the board of trustees at Alfred said, "Our Greek system simply does not contribute to the learning environment we want."

Other colleges and universities have implemented what they refer to as "decoupling," which means that fraternities and sororities are no longer allowed to have houses, and are placed on the same footing as other student organizations.

At many of the remaining colleges and universities, administrators wrestle with problems ranging from hazing to binge drinking and rowdiness. During the 1990s, three-quarters of insurance claims against fraternities involved alcohol. Hazing has long been a problem for fraternities, and incidents are now on the rise among sororities, from Northeastern University to the University of Michigan and the University of Colorado. A sorority at Cal State in Los Angeles was recently sued over the drowning deaths of two young women, allegedly the result of hazing.

Here in the south, many see the Greek system as the last bastion of segregation. Fraternities at Auburn, the University of Mississippi, the University of Alabama, and the University of Louisville recently received negative publicity for racist gestures.

Georgia Tech has always been of a more serious bent of mind. We are unlikely ever to appear on anyone's list of party schools, and even during the sixties most Tech students were too busy trying to pass calculus to have time for protests and sit-ins. Nevertheless, we are not immune to the problems plaguing Greek systems at other universities.

Four Georgia Tech fraternities have committed major hazing violations within the past five years. Sororities are not immune, either. This fall, one was put on probation for a year for hazing. Greek Week in the spring is a great opportunity for fraternities and sororities to enjoy campus-wide festivities, but last April two students, one male and one female, suffered broken arms in the arm wrestling competition.

A disproportionate number of alcohol and drug related incidents at Georgia Tech involve Greeks. Only 21 percent of Tech undergrads are active Greeks, but Greeks or Greek events accounted for more than half of the 14 students hospitalized last year for alcohol poisoning, and for more than half of the seven cases we have had so far this year. Sixty percent of last year's DUI cases were Greeks, as were 50 percent of the cases so far this year. We have had nine drug cases to date this fall, of which six were Greeks.

Our 2002 campus survey showed that 60 percent of fraternity and sorority leaders and 50 percent of Greeks in general had binged at least once in the two weeks prior to the survey, compared to only 28 percent of other students. And Greeks tend to be heavier drinkers, consuming an average of 5.7 drinks on a binge compared to the average of 2.7 for non-Greeks. Greek leaders reported consuming an average of 6.8 drinks.

It is interesting to note that the vast majority of alcohol use and abuse happens in fraternities rather than sororities. Since the fall of 2000, 93 percent of fraternity judicial incidents have involved alcohol, compared to only 16 percent of sorority incidents. And so far this fall alcohol has been a factor in every single fraternity judicial incident, but none of the sorority incidents have involved alcohol.

Some Greeks argue that they are private organizations and should not be subject to rigorous control by colleges and universities. But the campuses they are affiliated with bear a share of the legal liability for Greek behavior. We live in a litigious society, and colleges and universities have been successfully sued for the misdeeds of their fraternities and sororities. MIT, for example, was sued by the parents of a freshman who drank himself to death during a fraternity initiation rite, and paid \$4.75 million to the family to settle the suit.

Now, having reported on all of the negatives and problems that have plagued the Greek, I want to emphasize to you that the reason we are here today is to reaffirm what the Georgia Tech faculty said in 1888: We continue to believe that fraternities and sororities can be directed toward "worthy purposes" and can make a positive contribution to campus life. And rather than take away their houses or banish the Greek system entirely as others are doing, we are asking for your help and advice to change the system for the better.

Of course, we have processes and procedures in place to deal with problems like those I have been describing. But they are lengthy, complicated, and highly visible, and the publicity they generate does not contribute to the good name of Greeks. What's more, we seem to have a situation at Georgia Tech where a few bad apples are giving a bad

name to the whole barrel. It is important to remember that most of our chapters here on campus have remarkably few problems.

So what we want to explore with you at this Forum is pro-active ways to get out in front of the problems and prevent them. An important aspect of that process is more effective communication, and we want to work with our alumni leaders to help our fraternities and sororities understand the bigger picture and have a better grasp of their responsibilities and the consequences of their decisions.

We already have some efforts underway. For example, Georgia Tech is one of ten universities to receive a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant for a five-year program to reduce high-risk drinking by students. And we are working to change the norms, attitudes, policies, and practices relative to alcohol consumption, both on campus and off. That effort is reflected in a growing perception among Greek members that they are likely to be caught drinking at fraternity/sorority parties. And the number of students reporting problems at Greek parties is down.

But we want to do more than simply prevent problems. We want our fraternities and sororities to be a positive force on campus. We recently finalized a new Strategic Plan for Georgia Tech after many months of discussion with faculty, students, staff, alumni, and external advisors. The central tenet of that plan is that Georgia Tech will not simply be a university that tries to replicate the success of other institutions like Harvard, Stanford or MIT. Instead, we will create a new, future-looking model of excellence that others will want to emulate. Our goal is to define the technological university of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

That goal should apply to Greeks, and the Greek system should be part of our efforts. Rather than simply following the crowd in clamping down on Greeks or banning them entirely, we should be leading the way in creating a new model for excellence in Greek affairs.

Our fraternities and sororities do have many strengths, and they do lead the way in making contributions to the Institute in a number of ways. They contribute many hours to community service, and they account for the majority of donors to the Georgia Tech Student Foundation. Last school year 1,878 donations were made to the Student Foundation, of which 1,200 came from Greeks. We want to build on these strengths in the coming years.

No one can argue with the fact that one of Georgia Tech's strongest assets is our alumni. No other public university in the nation has the level of alumni participation,

commitment, and support that we do. And many of our strongest and most active alumni are former Greeks. Thirty-nine of the 44 trustees of the Georgia Tech Foundation were members of Greek organizations when they were students, and Greeks contribute to Roll Call in higher numbers than non-Greeks.

So this first Greek Alumni Forum represents our desire to involve you, our Greek alumni, in helping us to shape the strategic direction that we need to take to strengthen Georgia Tech's Greek system as a positive model. And we hope that the discussions you engage in over the course of this forum will help to lay the groundwork on which we can establish our goals and plans for the next four to five years of Greek life.

Again, thank you for coming. We value your advice, and we hope that in addition to helping us out, you will also enjoy this time of reconnecting with old friends and learning to know the next generation of Greeks at Georgia Tech.