I’m delighted to welcome all of you to FOCUS. When we held the first FOCUS weekend a little over ten years ago, a rather modest group of about 40 students showed up. If you look around the room this evening, you can get a feel for how successful it has become.

Of course, the largest group of FOCUS participants continues to be the brightest minority college juniors and seniors in the United States. And this year we are proud to welcome some 350 of you.

In addition to college students, FOCUS has expanded to include three other groups, and this evening’s dinner is the first time on the schedule for the weekend that all four groups have come together in the same room.

I’d like to also welcome the FOCUS Alumni who have already earned their Georgia Tech degrees. They are back to continue and renew friendships, and to help us communicate the message that a graduate degree, especially from Georgia Tech, is a very valuable asset that will open future doors of opportunity for you who are now juniors and seniors in college.

In addition, I want to welcome the FOCUS Fellows. This group includes 20 or so graduate students who are close to completing their PhDs, or are in post-doctoral programs. We want to be helpful to them as they prepare for their careers, hopefully in academia, and possibly here at Georgia Tech.

Finally, we are very excited about a fourth group that is new this year – the FOCUS Friends are about a dozen of the nation’s best minority high school students. They are here to explore the benefits of Georgia Tech’s undergraduate program, and we look forward to welcoming many of them back as students.

This special weekend commemorates the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr., that black and white children would join hands, and that the descendents of slaves and the descendents of slave-holders would sit down at the table together. But our goal is to do more than simply remember the dream. We want to make the dream a reality by encouraging each one of you to take your rightful place at the table and prepare yourselves for leadership.

We live in a time of incredible opportunity for educated minorities. Today’s global economy makes business and industry eager for diversity. And as our society becomes ever more technological, it will increasingly turn to those with a
technological education to provide leadership. So it is very important – for you personally and for our society – that each of you continue your quest for knowledge.

Here at Georgia Tech, we are committed to creating an environment where minorities are welcome and diversity is valued. That commitment is reflected in the fact that Georgia Tech was ranked first in the nation in graduating African American engineers at all degree levels by the magazine *Black Issues in Higher Education*. Frank Matthews, who is the publisher of *Black Issues in Higher Education*, says that Georgia Tech has succeeded because we have worked harder and more consistently over the years than other universities to build ongoing programs to recruit and retain minority students.

Those of you who come to Georgia Tech, and we hope that will be many of you, will find yourself among friends at an institution that is committed to providing the help and the services you need to succeed. And the people you meet and the friends you make this weekend will get you started on that journey.

Even if you decide that Georgia Tech is not a good fit for you, we urge you to pursue graduate studies at another university. Some of the alumni who are with us this weekend are on the faculty of other outstanding universities, and you may want to seek them out.

Whatever university is right for you, our nation needs your talents and ideas and endeavors. We need the special perspective you will bring as the African-American leaders of tomorrow. So please continue to pursue your education, if not here at Georgia Tech, then at another university.

Again, welcome. We are glad you’re here. And we hope you are having a wonderful weekend learning about Georgia Tech, planning for your future in higher education, and celebrating the life and vision of Martin Luther King, Jr. here in the city of his birth.