I always look forward to this luncheon each year, first and foremost because I want to personally thank and commend all of the Fellows who have taken advantage of the opportunities CETL offers to improve your teaching. Some of you are Teaching Fellows in the early years of your career and this is an opportunity to strengthen your teaching abilities. Others of you are Hesburgh Fellows, who are recharging your batteries and refreshing your teaching techniques. And then there are the STEP Fellows – graduate students in the Student and Teaching Enhancement Partnership program who have been “test-driving” the teaching profession through assignments in high school college-prep classes in math and science. Wherever you may be in your career, I commend you for your desire to be an outstanding teacher, and thank you for the contribution you make to Georgia Tech’s reputation for excellence in the classroom.

But there is a second reason why I look forward to this event each spring. And that is because it is inspiring to me to learn about the creative projects that you have developed. I am teaching a class in public policy this semester, and I’m hoping to come away from this luncheon with some good ideas that I can adapt to my own class.

A few years ago when Georgia Tech won the Hesburgh Award, which is the nation’s top prize for innovation in teaching and learning, some people were surprised that a technological research university paid so much attention to teaching.

Besides, our students are so very bright. Surely, the logic goes, they are capable of muddling through to success on their own. But in reality, highly intelligent students are just as much in need of good teaching as anyone. Textbooks provide important information and have an accuracy and reliability about them that is useful and needed. But we do not serve our students well if we reduce learning to a black-and-white series of facts and formulae.

What good teaching offers even the most intelligent student is critical ballast:

- guidance about the range of what they should know and understand, and about what is more or less important within that range;
- the ability to integrate the knowledge they are acquiring with what they already know;
- the opportunity to put their knowledge to work in creative and practical ways to solve problems;
- and a chance to learn important skills like teamwork and communication.

Research and teaching are not mutually exclusive, but rather closely related. They can and ought to enrich each other. Our students are not here to be taught in the same sense as younger pupils, but to learn, to discover, and to broaden their intellectual horizons. These are pretty much the same goals that you as faculty have in your own endeavors – after all,
research is a learning process. Georgia Tech is a community of learners. All of us – faculty, students and staff – should be learners somewhere on the spectrum.

Poet Robert Frost once said, “I teach in order to learn.” And I know from experience that teaching is a tremendous learning experience. Teaching reacquaints you with the subject matter of your discipline, requiring you to re-examine and reorganize the fundamentals on which you base your own work in order to articulate them clearly for others. It is also a learning experience to examine how your discipline can serve the larger world and what your students need to know in order to serve society better.

But when I went back into the classroom again this semester to teach, I was reminded that teaching a class is a lot like going to a dance. When you are preparing, you focus on the subject matter… on making sure you know the dance steps. But once you actually get there, a lot of what you do in the process of engaging in it has nothing to do with the dance steps. Teaching has taught me extremely valuable lessons in communications, in human relationships, and in motivation, both of myself and my students.

All of us conduct research, and the protocol calls for us to share the results with our colleagues at conferences, in juried publications, and elsewhere. We have structures and procedures to help us evaluate what works and what doesn’t, and that is considered a valuable part of the process of discovery.

But in teaching, we are mute. Most universities spend little time engaged in exploration and experimentation. And the vehicles for evaluating the results of any experimentation in the classroom tend to be connected to performance reviews, so faculty try to avoid the whole process at all costs.

But teaching, like research, is an important and complex knowledge-based activity, and we need to recognize the “scholarship of teaching.” We need to approach teaching as a scholarly activity, just as we do research. And that is what CETL helps us to do. As CETL Fellows, you are engaged in “the scholarship of teaching.” You are creating and experimenting with new methods and technology; you are uncovering new knowledge; you are examining what works and what doesn’t; and here at this luncheon, you are sharing the results with your colleagues. It is an extremely valuable pursuit that will serve you personally, even as it improves the climate for learning here at Georgia Tech.

So I am very pleased to be here today, to learn from you as you share your experiences as a Fellow, and to thank you for joining with CETL to bring excellent and innovative teaching into Georgia Tech’s classrooms.