I am excited to welcome all of you to Georgia Tech and to Atlanta, the birthplace of Martin Luther King, Jr. As usual, Robert Haley, with the help of countless Georgia Tech students, faculty, and staff, has put together a superb program for the weekend, and we hope you have a wonderful time.

We are especially pleased to welcome Dr. Danni Gladden-Green to the President’s Dinner this evening to bring the perspective of an African American woman who has succeeded in the world of high-tech business. Then at Sunday morning’s ecumenical service we will hear from Dr. Stewart Burns, who edited Martin Luther King Jr.’s papers and is one of the foremost experts on source materials about Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement. These two leaders provide great examples of African Americans who pursued graduate studies and went on to make a significant contribution to our nation and the world. And I want to thank them for coming to share their experiences with you.

This is the 13th consecutive year for FOCUS, when Georgia Tech invites the nation’s best African American college students, together with a select group of alumni, high school students, and prospective faculty, to join us for the King Holiday weekend. The motto for FOCUS is “a reflection of the past, a perception of the present, a vision for the future,” and we hope to capture all three of those elements. This special weekend is always a time to reflect on the life and the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., who dreamed that one day “on the red hills of Georgia” the descendants of slaves and the descendants of slave owners would sit down at the table together.

And as we remember those words, we celebrate the ways in which they have come true here at Georgia Tech. We are a national leader in graduating African American engineers. We are the leading institution that African American engineering undergraduates aspire to attend for their graduate studies. And we have invited you here to the red clay hills of Georgia to sit down at the table with us and gain a clearer perception of the present. We want this weekend to be a productive time of learning, thinking, and planning for the next stage of your life.

We also know that Dr. King’s work is not yet done, and your personal plans are part of a larger vision for the future. Over the past two decades, African Americans have increased from about two and a-half percent of America’s science and engineering workforce to nearly seven percent, and that is great progress. But minorities are still under-represented in science and engineering.

As our society becomes ever more technological, it will increasingly turn to those with a technological education to provide leadership. If minorities are to be fully represented among the technological leaders of tomorrow, it is very important – for you personally and for our society – that each of you continues your education.

Of course, we hope that you will do that here at Georgia Tech, and we are committed to creating an environment where minorities are welcome and diversity is valued. If you choose to come to
Georgia Tech, you will find yourself among friends at an institution that is dedicated to providing the help and the services you need to succeed. The people you meet and the friends you make this weekend will get you started on that journey.

If you decide that Georgia Tech is not a good fit for you, we urge you to pursue further education at another university. Because no matter what 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.

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.