REMARKS BY GEORGIA TECH PRESIDENT G. WAYENE CLOUGH
Dedication of the renovated John S. Coon Building, August 28, 2003

Thank you, Dean Schuster. I’m pleased to join with all of you in celebrating the renovation and retrofitting of Georgia Tech’s historic John Saylor Coon Building to serve as the new home for the School of Psychology.

When the Coon Building originally opened in 1920, it was the home of the School of Mechanical Engineering, and it served Georgia Tech in that capacity for decades until the manufacturing complex was built on the western side of campus. Its renovation is part of our efforts to restore and re-landscape the historic core of campus, preserving our heritage and at the same time converting these older facilities to serve our needs in the 21st century.

When Georgia Tech opened its doors in 1888, all 129 of its students were mechanical engineering majors. John S. Coon, who was the youngest charter member of the recently formed American Society of Mechanical Engineers, was responsible for shaping their curriculum. At the time, a debate was raging over whether engineering education ought to be characterized by the study of scientific theory or focused instead on manual shop training. The curriculum John Coon designed essentially answered the debate by combining rigorous academic studies in theory with hands-on work in shops and labs where the academic concepts of the classroom were applied to practical problems.

His curriculum became a national model and resulted in Georgia Tech’s Woodruff School of Mechanical Engineering being named an official ASME Heritage Site – with the word site in quotation marks because it is an academic unit rather than a physical piece of ground.

So this facility is more than just a historic structure that we are preserving. It is an icon of the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience that is still embedded in Georgia Tech’s character and culture more than 100 years later. Our faculty and students are known both for the rigor of their academic education and for their knack for solving practical problems in creative ways. It is an approach to education that is just as sound today as it was more than 100 years ago, and just as apropos for other disciplines like psychology as it is for mechanical engineering.

It is also an issue to which our special guest speaker has given considerable thought and attention. Nancy Cantor is the co-author with Steven Schomberg of an article in the March/April issue of Edu-Cause Review entitled “Poised between two worlds: The university as monastery and marketplace,” which looks at the same challenge of the theoretical versus the practical and comes to much the same conclusion as John Coon – that the university needs to stand with a foot in each place.

She and Steven Stromberg also co-authored an article for Change Magazine at the end of last year addressing a related balance point in higher education – the question of how to balance playfulness with responsibility.
Nancy Cantor is the Chancellor of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which was one of the original 37 public land-grant institutions founded within ten years of the signing of the Morrill Act by Abraham Lincoln in 1862. It is also one of about 20 institutions that we keep a close eye on here at Georgia Tech. UIUC has a high level of quality and strong technological programs, we believe we can learn from them. We would like to know, for example, how they have managed to win all of those NSF CAREER Awards and produce 16 Nobel laureates from among their faculty and alumni.

I personally would like to know how Chancellor Cantor manages to keep up with a campus with more than 38,000 students and nearly 2,000 faculty.

Dr. Cantor holds a Ph.D. in psychology from Stanford University. She came to the University of Illinois as chancellor a little over two years ago from the University of Michigan, where she was provost and executive vice president of academic affairs. Prior to that, she served as dean of the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies and vice provost for academic affairs at Michigan, and as chair of the psychology department at Princeton.

As a psychologist specializing in personality and social psychology, and personality and cognition, she is the co-author or co-editor of three books, numerous book chapters, and many scientific journal articles. She is a member of the Institute of Medicine and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She is the president of the board of directors of the American Association for Higher Education and serves on the national advisory board for the National Survey of Student Engagement.

She also has served on various advisory boards and study committees of the National Science Foundation and the National Research Council, and recently was a member of the Congressional Commission on Military Training and Gender-Related Issues.

I am honored to welcome Chancellor Cantor to the campus of Georgia Tech and pleased to present her to speak on “Challenging Our Expertise.”