On behalf of Georgia Tech, I’m pleased to welcome all of you to Atlanta. We are glad you’ve joined us for the 14th annual FOCUS weekend to celebrate the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and to explore the possibilities for the next stage of your education as the leaders of tomorrow.

Some fifty years ago, when Martin Luther King, Jr. was a young college student, he wrote, “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.” It was a lesson he learned well. He prepared for leadership with a graduate divinity degree from Crozer Seminary and a Ph.D. from Boston University. His vision for America’s future was inspired by his studies, and his goals and actions were grounded in academic scholarship.

Dr. King combined the education he needed to think intensively and critically, with courage to translate his ideas into action. He was only 34 years old when he led the march on Washington, delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech and won the Nobel Peace Prize. He never lived to see his 40th birthday. But he launched the most sweeping social reform movement America had ever seen, and in the process he changed this nation and the world forever. His words and his example continue to inspire us today, more than three decades after his death.

I was a student here at Georgia Tech during the civil rights movement, and Dr. King’s speeches and accomplishments had a profound effect on me, as they did on many others around me. I watched with pride as Georgia Tech became the first public university in this state to admit African-American students without a court order. It was the first step in what has become a Georgia Tech tradition of promoting diversity and encouraging minority students.

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.

You are among the brightest and the best this nation has to offer. You have excelled and earned honors at your respective schools, and I urge each one of you to follow in Dr. King’s footsteps and prepare yourself for leadership with an advanced degree. Graduate school can help you further refine your leadership skills, further develop your potential and further discover the vision that will shape your future.

Of course, I urge you to consider Georgia Tech’s graduate programs. As one of the nation’s foremost technological institutions, we have much to offer you. U.S. News & World Report ranks Georgia Tech among the nation’s top ten public universities, and our College of Engineering among the top five engineering programs in the nation. We are also a leader in enrolling National Achievement Scholars and in graduating minority engineers.
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.