

REMARKS BY GEORGIA TECH PRESIDENT G. WAYNE CLOUGH  
Present Distinguished Professor Award to Bryan Norton  
Faculty-Staff Awards Luncheon, April 12, 2006

I want to begin by paying tribute to the classes of 1934 and 1940, who provided us with the means to honor and reward outstanding performances by the Georgia Tech faculty. When our alumni see the value of their Georgia Tech education demonstrated in their careers, they invariably hark back to our superb and hard-working faculty as the critical factor in that education. The classes of 1934 and 1940 understood how important it was to encourage and recognize excellence demonstrated by the faculty, and the endowments they created are what make Georgia Tech's top faculty awards possible.

With so many excellent faculty to choose from, narrowing the field down to one person to receive Georgia Tech's highest faculty honor is always a challenge. But each year, the committee sorts through the many outstanding nominations and comes up with just the right recommendations for the Distinguished Professor Award. And as I look at the finalists, I am always impressed and amazed at the incredible caliber of faculty we have here at Georgia Tech. No wonder Jean-Lou Chameau has to spend so much time trying to keep other universities from recruiting them away.

This year is certainly no exception. The winner of the 2006 Distinguished Professor Award is an internationally renowned and respected expert in his field. And that is not so surprising for Georgia Tech. What is something of a surprise is that he is a philosopher, which is not exactly what you might expect to find at a technological university. But Bryan Norton received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Michigan in 1970 and, prior to coming to Georgia Tech in 1988, was professor of philosophy at New College of Florida – an honors college where you can major in philosophy and would expect to find philosophers on the faculty.

So, what is it that has kept a philosopher on the Georgia Tech faculty for 18 years and enabled him to become internationally renowned? The answer is Georgia Tech's genuinely interdisciplinary environment that enables our talented and creative faculty to move out on the leading edge of emerging new fields.

As Public Policy Chair Diana Hicks pointed out in her nominating letter, most philosophers work alone and without the benefit of outside grants, writing books to which few outside the field of philosophy pay any attention. In contrast, Bryan Norton's work is collaborative, transcends disciplinary boundaries, brings in competitive grants from organizations like the National Science Foundation, and is changing perceptions and practices across the nation and around the world.

Dr. Norton is a leading scholar in applying philosophy to an area of special focus for Georgia Tech – environmental sustainability. Most of the students and faculty who work in sustainability focus on scientific aspects like chemical processes for industry that are more environmentally benign, or on developing environmentally sustainable technology like solar cells or hydrogen

fuel cells. Dr. Norton approaches sustainability from a different angle. He says, “What people really mean by the term sustainability is to ask what they value: Sustain what? I think that’s a community-based question.”

His exploration of how to communicate sustainability and make it a practical part of how we as a society interact with the environment has been so profound that he has no equal and there is no expert on biodiversity policy who is in greater demand than he. Listen to these words from the editor of *Environmental Values*, who is also Professor Emeritus at Lancaster University in Great Britain:

“All of Professor Norton’s work is notable for its intellectual strength and resilience; it is focused, thorough, and carefully crafted. He is at once highly regarded as a philosopher while at the same time having an impressive command of various branches of the social and natural sciences that bear on the formation and implementation of environmental policy. Forceful and tenacious in argument, and an excellent communicator, I can testify to the fact that Professor Norton is a commanding presence at any gathering, and is always listened to with respect. Impressive on all fronts, he brings distinction to the Georgia Institute of Technology.”

Bryan Norton started out as a philosopher of language, especially the language of science and logic. Then his career moved more toward environmental policy and the philosophy of biology. Today, he brings these two areas of expertise together, applying the analytical tools of the philosophy of language to the concept of sustainable development.

His work also bridges a critical social divide. If you think back over the history of the environmental movement, you will recall that it began as a pitched battle pitting environmental preservation against economic development. However, in recent years it has been morphing toward an acknowledgement that we as humans are part of the natural eco-system and achieving environmental sustainability in the way we operate our economies and societies will contribute to the quality of our lives, rather than detracting from it.

This pragmatic approach that embeds the philosophical and ethic aspects of environmentalism into a practical and adaptive management process is the work of Dr. Norton. He is co-founder of a growing movement in environmental ethics and philosophy called Environmental Pragmatism. His newest book, which just came out last fall and is entitled *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* and focuses on developing a new, practical, interdisciplinary approach and vocabulary to sustainability that integrates science and social values. It is the latest in a string of 10 books he has either written or edited over the past 30 years. That does not count the 28 book chapters he has written. Or the 46 refereed journal papers and research reports. Or his 170 other published papers.

His own career has been full of the kind practical communication and engagement he advocates. For example, he was the principal investigator for National Science Foundation grant that funded a workshop he put on together with Dr. Terry Maple of Tech’s School of Psychology and Zoo Atlanta. The workshop brought together two warring factions – conservationists from zoos and animal welfare advocates – to develop consensus on how to treat wild animals in zoos and captive breeding programs.

The workshop produced a set of guidelines that were subsequently adopted by the American Zoological Association and became the basis of one of Dr. Norton's books – *Ethics on the Ark: Zoos, Animal Welfare, and Wildlife Conservation*. This book, in turn, became the template for a series of workshops and additional books sponsored by the Smithsonian Institute aimed at improving animal conservation programs and the treatment of animals in captivity. This is just one example of the practical impact of Bryan Norton's work.

He recently concluded nine years of service on the board of Defenders of Wildlife, which is one of the nation's leading advocates for the conservation of biodiversity, and the president commented that it was unprecedented for his organization to put a philosopher on the Board of Directors. They made an exception for Dr. Norton, because they felt he had a contribution to make, and they found that even so they had underestimated his incredible breadth of expertise and the tremendous benefits he brought to Defenders of Wildlife.

Dr. Norton's ability to communicate and make things happen carries over into the classroom as well. His students in the School of Public Policy routinely give him high marks, and offer comments like these: "Dr. Norton's breadth and depth of knowledge is amazing, and he explains difficult concepts very clearly." Or "I thought that this was one of the most informative classes I have ever taken. I feel like this instructor really cared about his subject and the students – which made this class fun to attend." Or "This class is the best I have had at Georgia Tech. Dr. Norton explained complex material very well, and the class discussion was extremely helpful in understanding the material."

His graduate students are equally effusive. Third-year doctoral student Paul Hirsch says, "He is one of the very best teachers I have encountered here at Georgia Tech or at the other institutions I have attended." And Jeffery Swanagan, who wrote his master's thesis under Dr. Norton's direction and is now the executive director of the new Georgia Aquarium, says: "I developed a lot of our concepts [at the Aquarium] with specific regard to the 'contextualism' environmental ethics I learned from Dr. Norton."

It gives me a great deal of pride and pleasure to present Georgia Tech's highest honor, the Distinguished Professor Award, to Dr. Bryan Norton.