Dear Mr. President

Peterson’s arrival should lead to a shift in Tech’s culture

With new leadership comes new opportunities to redefine Tech and its culture. This week’s official appointment of George P. “Bud” Peterson as Tech’s president offers a chance for change. Although many past traditions and initiatives will undoubtedly be maintained, Peterson’s fresh outlook could translate into a culture shift at Tech. For one, Peterson should bring the thriving entrepreneurial spirit of Boulder to campus. Tech and the city of Atlanta have all the potential they need to be at the crossroads of business and technology.

Despite being a top research institution, the quality of teaching at Tech is lacking. Excellence in research should remain a primary focus for the Institute in recruiting the best professors, but a change in the teaching culture is in order. More visible incentives that reward excellence in the teaching culture is in order. More visible incentives that reward excellence in the teaching culture is in order. More visible incentives that reward excellence in the teaching culture is in order. More visible incentives that reward excellence in the teaching culture is in order.

The quality of student life also needs attention. As someone who understands the value of the college experience, Peterson should come in with a new perspective on improving student life and boosting morale on campus. Along the same lines, the culture of learning at Tech can be transformed from one that values rankings, grades and getting a job over curiosity, problem solving and flexibility.

While Peterson’s engineering background is an obvious match for Tech, the institute could gain from expanding its focus beyond this one area. Interdisciplinary and non-engineering programs should not be left out of the spotlight. In addition, Tech could benefit from a culture of collaboration in which students are encouraged to explore different fields at the many universities nearby.

Another opportunity for Peterson is to improve Tech’s culture of communication. The current decentralized and disjointed channels that connect the administration, faculty and students leave much to be desired. Greater transparency and convenience are needed to make information available at everyone’s fingertips.

Beyond the obvious, Peterson’s arrival could mark the beginning of a new era for the Institute and its still-developing culture. His legacy is yet to be written.

The Consensus Opinion reflects the majority opinion of the Editorial Board of the Technique, but not necessarily the opinions of individual editors.

Mentioned in this Opinion:

Hahnming Lee, Blake Israel, Emily Chambers, Jonathan Saethang, Reem Mansoura, Siwan Liu, Craig Tabita, Jenny Zhang Morgan, Nicholas Sondej, Emily Chambers, Jonathan Saethang, Reem Mansoura, Siwan Liu, Craig Tabita, Jenny Zhang Morgan, Nicholas Sondej

OPINIONS

“Success is a lazy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can’t lose.”
—Bill Gates

Friday, February 27, 2009

Your Views: Letters to the Editor

Tech should join city for Earth Hour

From melting glaciers to dramatic weather patterns, climate change is impacting life on Earth. On March 28 at 8:30 p.m., tens of millions of people will demonstrate concern for our planet by turning out their lights for one hour. I urge the Tech community to take part and support Earth Hour. More than 50 million people participated in 2008, as lights went dark at the Empire State Building, Golden Gate Bridge and Sydney’s Opera House. Earth Hour 2009 will be even bigger, with more than 240 cities and hundreds of college campuses taking part.

The Tech Freshman Council, along with several environmental groups on campus, is partnering with the Mayor’s Office and City Councilman Wkansa Hall to put on a “Lights Out Georgia Tech” program to partner with “Lights Out Atlanta.” The program will likely be the signature event in this movement for the city of Atlanta and solidify Tech as a flagship university in this cause—but only with the participation of each and every student, residence hall and building.

This is a critical moment for our planet. Through Earth Hour we can collectively raise our voices and demand that our elected leaders join with the global community to find solutions to this urgent problem. On March 28 at 8:30, let’s all turn out for Earth Hour and for the future of our planet.

Joe Charbonnet
First-year CE

OCEB renovation makes little sense

I suppose it takes a school with an amazing architecture and engineering program to support an amazingly stupid architecture and engineering mistakes. What I’m referring to, of course, is the wheelchair accessibility of the recently refurbished Old Civil Engineering Building (OCEB).

The building is compliant with the ADA. That’s not the problem. The problem is that on the front patio area, a wheelchair ramp leads down from the main doors to the patio area but no additional ramp leads from that patio area to the sidewalk level. Essentially, this means that wheelchair users who expect to exit the building via the front entrance—a reasonable request—will find themselves trapped on the front patio area, unable to leave the building from there.

After talking with some faculty knowledgeable about the refurbishing, it appears there was a plan to have a second, very discreet ramp leading to the sidewalk level. However, due to GT Capital Planning and Space Management’s overly stringent requirement that the front of the building not be altered in the slightest, this plan was put on hold. Arriving at the building will quickly see that the left staircase leading from the sidewalk could have been easily and discretely converted to a wheelchair-accessible ramp with essentially no change in the building’s visible facade.

That refurbishing was meant to last the building probably at least 30 years. Now we’ll have to deal with stupid inflexibility for at least that long.

Nicholas Sondej
First-year CMPE

One-track mentality endangers Tech

A problem I see at Tech is the idea of “compartmentalized” minds. It is best demonstrated by those who come here thinking they will escape into the physical sciences (or technology, industry or business). These men and women include some of mankind’s best brains. They are able to perform feats of brilliant conceptual integration and exceptional thinking in engineering, computer science, technology and business. Yet they become hopelessly anti-conceptual in all the other aspects of their lives, particularly in human relationships and social issues. But no such refuge is possible. Think of all the dangers that a compartmentalized mind creates and perpetuates. It means that the engineers and scientists competent to discover new knowledge are not able to judge for what purpose that knowledge is to be used. Instead, learn to accept that no such refuge exists. Man cannot survive as half-scientist, half-terrified person. So long as one wants use one’s achievements in reality, one must learn to face and understand the irrationality in human relationships. If there are degrees of urgency, I would say that it is the engineers and scientists who need to speak up most. The nature of their power and responsibility are too important.

Kate Bowen
Fourth-year CE
**Reasons matter, so think before you preach**

Perhaps it is the slow economy, the stress of midterms or even the inconsistent weather, but something seems to be putting people on edge. It is as though there is a virus going around that is causing people to disagree simply for the sake of disagreeing. So what’s the deal? Why can’t we all just get along?

It’s not for lack of effort. All of us, I know the bright readers of The Technique are already thinking about how our favorite Entertainment Weekly awards mark the end of another season is dedicated to doling out criticism and wondering how I could possibly be concerned with other people’s ways without looking at my own. This is causing people to disagree simply for the sake of disagreeing. So what’s the deal? Why can’t we all just get along?

Every week we distribute praise or punishment in the form of words and little black stars to pass judgment onto something that people have presumably put time and effort into. It’s hard to say. I’d like to believe that we do our best to make sure things are said with a mind and base our opinions on reasons that we have thought through carefully.

Do we always succeed? Not a chance, and I’m not going to pretend that we do.

Biases and emotions (which can be helpful and make a critique personal and unique) are at times too influential and cause us to miss the point. For the most part, however, we attempt to write an essay considering both the qualities that we find admirable as well as the aspects that we disagree with.

But I’m not talking about opinions that even attempt to be rational. My concern is with the profound negativity that sometimes runs with our disagreements. An acquaintance of ours overheard us arguing at school, and when my buddy asked this guy whether or not he also enjoyed the show, he simply shook his head and said, “No, it’s terrible.” That’s it. We tried justifying why we enjoy the show, the conversation basically ended there.

But what is the real motivation behind our arguments? Why should we have to say what we think and why we think that way? Because there are reasons you feel positively about the subject, and letting other people know your reasons gives them the information that you have at least thought through your argument, even if they still disagree.

To say something “sucks because it’s stupid” or “is great because I like it” doesn’t really mean anything. Why does it suck? Is it just a bad film? Aren’t there possible reasons why it might not suck? Or conversely, what is it that makes it so great? Very brash judgments without hesitation are not as informative or as stimulating as opinions with substance.

Now, I’m not going to sit here and lecture some high horse and say I always give the best reasons for my beliefs; there are plenty of times when I pass judgment too quickly or dwell on the comics without seeing the pros. But I do know the importance of judging things fairly, and through conversations do not all need to be turned into borderline scientific discussions (especially on matters that are somewhat trivial, like TV show preferences), it still wouldn’t be a bad idea to explain why we think the way we do while keeping our minds open to other ideas.

Part of the problem could be that it is easier this way. It is so much simpler to just have an opinion without thinking about why you feel like that. And while it is nice to have a go-to schema to simplify everything, it also makes us more likely to base everything on one thing we love or that one thing we hate.

This makes for an inaccurate representation of whatever it is that you are arguing.

Or maybe the problem is that truly listening to others has become less and less common.

We focus on our own interests and are not listening to others’ responses to our viewpoints. The point of debate is to question and is so important that it makes us lose sight of the possibility that other opinions could be just as valid and reasonable.

It is through dissenting opinions that we are able to learn. Even if you completely disagree with what I say, perhaps if I give you my reasons and thinking behind my argument, you will at least understand why I said it. And, in turn, we will get the chance to respond to your reasons and thinking.

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**U.S. minds turn to media in hard times**

After the glitz and the glam, the musicals and the flurry of pretty dresses, the Academy Awards mark the end of another film awards season. As the curtains close and the lights dim, America’s grim economic and political reality begins to set in once again. As easy as it may be to avoid them, eventually we have to recognize the problems that face our country and act against them.

The idea of American escapism, as imagined by the 2009 Best Picture winner Slumdog Millionaire (whose popularity can be compared to the rags-to-riches stories of Horatio Alger of the late 1800s), even a plum kid can rise from extreme poverty and achieve his dreams.

In the end, the underdog does not win by sitting around in front of his or her television, but rather through fighting, struggling and coming our victorious. In the same fashion, the underdog does not win by sitting around in front of his or her television, but rather through fighting, struggling and coming our victorious.

As imagined by the 2009 Best Picture winner Slumdog Millionaire (whose popularity can be compared to the rags-to-riches stories of Horatio Alger of the late 1800s), even a slime kid can rise from extreme poverty and achieve his dream.

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**BUZZ Around the Campus**

*Does SGA do a good job of communicating with you?*

**I don’t really know anything about SGA, so obviously there might be a communication problem.**

Kevin Pham
Fourth-year EE

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**Molly Williams**
Third-year STAC

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**Nathan Klein**
Fourth-year ECE

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**Alex Henke**
Second-year ECON and INTA

**“SGA is doing a good job communicating with me, mostly through personal interaction with SGA members.”**

Photos by Ben Keyserling

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**Technique • February 27, 2009 • 11**

**Opinions**
In times of recession, ‘everyday low prices’ trump liberal guilt

I have been a devout bargain shopper for most of my life. With a few classic exceptions such as Vera Bradley bags (I have a seemingly endless need for quilted paisley), I generally prefer to buy cheap, in bulk or preferably both. From a young age I have known exactly where to go: that Mecca of low prices, Wal-Mart. I have even purchased outfits for sorority recruitment there, and have been quite happy with the results.

Sad, starting about five years ago my seemingly innocent habit became a topic of concern from many friends. I was informed in no uncertain terms that I was undermining the capitalist system, supporting slave labor and killing the Amazon, all while endorsing sexism and racism. I was horrified, but being the relatively lame and overly argumentative person that I am, I chose to take the hard route.

Rather than simply modify my behavior and join the raging hoards demanding the destruction of one of America’s most successful businesses, I did research. I continued to shop at Wal-Mart and simply looked up statistics to defend my behavior. Now, after years of vainly pointing out the benefits of the big, yellow smiley faces to my more ardently opposed friends, I have finally gotten my revenge.

Hopefully, I will never have to make my passionate argument about the net benefit of Wal-Mart in rural communities or for the urban lower class again. Hopefully, I will never again have to explain to my more liberal and academical friends demanding the destruction of products that much of America once judged. In the last quarter of 2008 (that time when the global economy was spiraling down the drain), Wal-Mart recorded an 8.5 percent growth in sales, with heavy growth internationally and at established Wal-Mart centers. In other words, it wasn’t all thanks to returning customers.

Wal-Mart’s internal statistics suggest that much of this cash influx came straight from new customers, that from that almost unimaginable portion of the population that had managed to avoid shopping at Wal-Mart before they realized that lettuce really should cost less than four dollars (what we do Whole Foods put in their lettuce that makes it worth that, by the way?).

Of course, Wal-Mart was not a perfect business, but it is a great business model. Wal-Mart does not expect you to have a line of credit—they sell products that are cheap enough that you can actually buy them in cash. Wal-Mart gives people the opportunity to live within their means while still enjoying the wide array of products and services that we as Americans have defined as crucial to our everyday lives. Wal-Mart lets all of us buy the things we feel we “need” at prices that reflect exactly how much we actually “need” them.

Emily Chambers
Outreach Editor

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