

OUR VIEWS CONSENSUS OPINION

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 teaching should be put in place. Given his long teaching background, Peterson is the right person to begin this shift.

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.

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EDITORIAL CARTOON BY CRAIG TABITA



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 Kwanza 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 make 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 bound persons 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

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Letters should not exceed 400 words and should be submitted by Tuesday at 7 p.m. in order to be printed in the following Friday's issue. Include your full name, year (1st, 2nd, etc.) and major. We reserve the right to edit for style and length. Only one submission per person will be printed per term.

not be altered in the slightest, this plan was revoked. Anyone looking at the building will quickly see that the left staircase leading from the patio to 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 rational thinking in engineering, computer science, technology and business. Yet they become helplessly 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 perpetrates. 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, that 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 is so much simpler to just have an opinion without thinking about why you feel like that."

Daniel Spiller
Entertainment Editor

First of all, I know the bright readers of the *Technique* are already thinking about how my entire Entertainment section is dedicated to doling out criticism and wondering how I could possibly be concerned with other people's ways without looking at my own first. They are absolutely right. 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. Is that fair?

It's hard to say. I'd like to believe that we do our best to judge things with an open mind and base our opinions on reasons that we have thought through.

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 our reviews 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 is rooted in nothing. Disagreements have gone from "I think you are wrong," to "you are wrong," as though somehow one person's statement is fact while the other's is opinion (and an incorrect one, too).

I was recently talking with a friend of mine while waiting for class to start when we happened to reference a TV show that we both enjoy. An acquaintance of ours overheard us talking, and when my buddy asked this guy whether or not he also enjoyed the show, our acquaintance simply shook his head and said, "No, it's terrible." That's it. Though we tried justifying why we enjoy the show, the conversation basically ended there.

But what is the real motivation to justify our opinions? Why should we have to say

what we think and why we think that way? Because there are reasons you feel positively or negatively 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? 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 on 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 cons without seeing the pros. But I do know the importance of judging things fairly, and though 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 that 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.

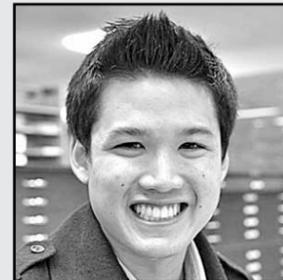
We focus on our own interests and are not listening to others' responses to our viewpoints. The goal of being right is so important that it makes us lose sight of the possibility that other opinions could be just as valid and reasonable.

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 I, in turn, will give the same respect to your reasons and thinking.

BUZZ

Around the Campus

Does SGA do a good job of communicating with you?



Kevin Pham
Fourth-year EE

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



Molly Williams
Third-year STAC

"SGA is doing an excellent job...I could communicate with them relatively easily."



Nathan Klein
Fourth-year ECE

"I don't pay attention to anything they've sent me, so no."



Alex Henke
Second-year ECON and INTA

"SGA is doing a pretty good job communicating with me, mostly through personal interaction with SGA members."

Photos by Ben Keyserling

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 media 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.



"Instead of letting the nation's problems passively go by, it is our responsibility as citizens to keep ourselves informed..."

Vivian Fan
Layout Editor

The idea of American escapism was most observed during the Great Depression, during which Americans experienced incredible levels of unemployment. While citizens felt the impact of a spiraling economy, American film began to emerge, producing cinematic legends like Judy Garland, Fred Astaire and Shirley Temple.

As theaters dodged problems with cheery films, even President Franklin D. Roosevelt recognized the power of the media, observing "that for just 15 cents, an American can go to a movie and look at the smiling face of a baby and forget his troubles."

Now more than ever, it is incredibly tempting to escape to the fantasy that the media purports rather than face the real problems of our nation. On a Wednesday night, it is far less frightening to turn on the television to another episode of *Lost* than CNN or FOX News. It is also far easier and more pleasant to believe that even in

a struggling economy, business in the paper industry of Scranton, Pa. is still booming, and that you too, America, can one day afford a home and marry the sweet receptionist that you love.

However, in the end, reality always takes over. As easy as it may be to escape the news headlines of corruption, bankruptcy and war, real life is inevitable. It is impossible to escape, and even more futile to try. In comparison to the escapist entertainment of the 1930s, however, ours is more complex, acknowledging hard times but hardly reflecting it. While in the real world costs are rising, stocks are dipping to all-time lows, and men and women are losing their jobs, the fictional world on the silver screen seems to suggest otherwise.

Even the "desperate housewives" realize there is an economic recession, but that doesn't seem to stop them from driving around in their brand-new Lexuses and shell-ing out thousands of dollars

for their kids' private schools.

Although this is only fiction, the same ignorance can be observed in news media. Even after the election, American news stations seemed to be blinded by the "real" issues at hand. They chose to focus on such hard-hitting topics as what type of dog the Obama girls would be getting (Portuguese water hound or Labradoodle?) and Michelle Obama's fashion choices.

At the same time, a war was raging and financial establishments such as Ernst and Young and Lehman Brothers fell into bankruptcy. Yet as the recession continues to dig an even deeper hole in the failing economy, the real problems still persist and will eventually break into focus.

Despite the obvious fact that film and television are indeed fantasy, one aspect of it can be taken to heart. Yes, we may not live out the fairy tale happy endings that are portrayed in movies, but people are capable of overcoming their struggles.

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 slum kid can rise from extreme poverty and achieve his dream. 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 out victorious. In the same fashion, we as Americans should follow suit.

Instead of letting the nation's problems passively go by, it is our responsibility as citizens to keep ourselves informed and involved. Despite the discomfort or unpleasantness that watching negative newscast after negative newscast means, it is a necessity for Americans to do so. By keeping ourselves informed, we will be able to act in a more educated fashion and possibly in a way that can push our country forwards rather than backwards.

Rather than spending time reporting on Paris Hilton's latest publicity stunt or insipid YouTube hits, the media should be informing itself and acting in any way it can to deal with today's most pressing issues. While America's escapism may aid the film and the television industry, there are still multitudes of other places where our money and attention would help more.

OUR VIEWS HOT OR NOT

HOT-or-NOT



Race reloaded

Princeton professor Cornel West—renowned scholar, civil rights activist and even actor (appearing in two of the three *Matrix* movies)—visited Tech this week to share his firebrand views with the Tech community. Starting a conversation with Tech students on race in what has recently and controversially been termed a ‘nation of cowards’ is a step in a positive direction.



Best bias award

This year’s Oscars were riddled with the same bias for the usual tragic dramas. *Wall-E* and the *Dark Knight* were not even nominated for Best Picture, while Mickey Rourke’s outstanding performance in *The Wrestler* unsurprisingly lost to Sean Penn’s depiction of gay politician Harvey Milk (a Rourke win would have given the *Technique* an impressive six-for-six prediction streak).



Dancing stars

This year’s Dance Marathon broke new records of participation, with almost 300 students dancing for hours to raise funds for Atlanta’s children. Although the event did not raise as much money as last year, Dance Marathon continued to offer Tech students the chance to do a good—and fun—deed.



Gmail scare

Prompting a slew of confused and sometimes angry updates on blogs, Twitter and Facebook, this week’s Gmail’s outage caused panic among users. Sure, the server was only out temporarily during the middle of the night, but we were reminded of our shameless dependency on Google for normal functioning.

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.

Sadly, 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 roaring 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 academically-minded friends that the overall product availability, GDP and tax revenue of a county almost always goes up when a Wal-Mart is in-



“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

troducted. And hopefully, I will no longer have to explain that yes, Wal-Mart’s part-time employment policy was racist and sexist but it does not negate the overall brilliance of the part-time employment idea, nor does it nullify the benefits of shopping there.

Hopefully, the vehement attacks on my shopping habits will cease altogether, as recent statistics indicate that many of those customers who had the liberty of avoiding Wal-Mart’s “everyday low prices” are spending their shrinking incomes on the discounted 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 8.3 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, 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 in the world does 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. For example, I really only “need” shimmery lip gloss at a going rate of about 15 cents an ounce, and Wal-Mart can provide me with that rate.

As individuals continue to tighten their belts, the culture of excess that has run rampant for the past few years is finally shrinking. Of course, the recession is a horrible turn for our economy and our country, but I think the growing profits of Wal-Mart might just show one benefit. As budgets shrink, so does self-righteous grandstanding about the moral responsibility of superstores. People are finally realizing what I have known all along. Wal-Mart products are just as good as any store’s—at half the price.



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