Next year, a reporter interviewed me about an Honors Program student who has accomplished some remarkable things on campus, and at one point I said, “He’s a leader because he does things; he doesn’t do things to be a leader.” I hadn’t really figured that out in advance, but it actually made sense to me: the labor ought to come before the laurels, the toil ought to precede the title.

It’s not sure that’s yet the standard at Georgia Tech. We have no dearth of leadership positions for students—leadership titles, anyway. There are Peer Leaders in the residence halls, “Team Leaders” in GT 1000, and some student organizations seem to have as many vice-presidents and committee chairs as members. These titles remind me of the little trophies we handed out when I coached my daughter’s kidde soccer team: everybody got one. That’s fine for fourth-graders, but I wonder if it makes sense for college students. We have lots of “leaders,” but did they do much to merit the title?

OK, sure, I know one reason for the “leader” titles. They carry a lot of cachet than, say, “Resident Advisor” or “Cause Assistant.” But this proliferation of leadership titles debases the currency: if too many resumes say “leader of this” or “vice-president of that,” they begin to cancel each other out, or become semi-meaningless. If I’m a resume reader, I’d still want to know if the alleged leaders ever did anything that really made a difference, and if they actually learned how to work with, much less lead, other people in an effective way.

In the interest of full disclosure, I’ll tell you that I once spent a swell weekend at a “leadership retreat” for a small group of Georgia Tech administrators and faculty members. We talked, ate well, did some observation exercises, and nobody got hurt. I still see the people from the retreat, and we’ve become the core of a growing network of what I call “Useful Citizens of the Institute.” The people I found to be less than useful at the retreat, however, were a couple of control-freak “facilitators” from California who, as far as I could tell, had never led anything but leadership retreats.

We continue to talk about “leadership” at Georgia Tech, and we even have a couple of leadership programs for both faculty and students, with maybe more to come as a result of our strategic planning process. I hope they work. In the meantime, here are three things I believe about leadership:

1. Leadership can never be achieved just by taking the label of “leader.” It can probably be learned, it can maybe be taught, but it can never be achieved just by taking the label of “leader.”

2. So there you go: get to work, do something useful, and you’ll no doubt wind up being a leader—a real one, the kind that’s actually earned the title.

3. At mid-semester, many first-years feel they are on a sink-or-swim cusp, but that’s largely an illusion. Midterm reports are only a decent indicator of time management success, but they aren’t necessarily an accurate measure of academic progress, and certainly not any measure of intellectual capability. And, by the way, they don’t go on a student’s record. When you realize that a small disappointment—like not getting the highest score on a test—can lead to improvement in your techniques (study habits, organization, schedule-keeping etc.), you might decide that praising disappointment isn’t as silly as it sounds.
In light of this change, this month's question was: "What would you like to change about Field Hall?" The responses were varied, one respondent said: "Can our automatic door be fixed? It's especially nice when our hands are full!" On the other hand, "I love Field. I agree that everything is perfect now that the door alarm or the sudden lack of automatic doors.

The question also brought out a couple of practical suggestions, unrelated to the doors. Field, being the honors hall, seems to have more active residents than other halls. The downside of this is that it's often hard to meet everyone, as they're always out doing things elsewhere. One respondent said: "I want! more Field Hall activities! I feel like I still don't know everyone in the hall!" Other suggestions included repainting the railings in the stairwells, railings that show about four layers of paint due to years of wear, in colors ranging from 70s green to white, black, and bare metal. A final suggestion was the addition of a food vending machine to the existing drink machine in the basement, a suggestion likely to be backed by everyone gearing up for midterms this month.

With luck, Field may see some of these changes, and that's part of what makes it great. We're in one of the few dorms that is run by more than just the housing office, and HP loves its freshmen. With luck, Field may see some of these changes, and that's part of what makes it great. We're in one of the few dorms that is run by more than just the housing office, and HP loves its freshmen.

"October is a fine and dangerous season in America. A wonderful time to begin anything at all. You go to college, and every course in the catalogue looks wonderful." — Thomas Merton

Honors Program Special Topic Courses for Spring 2011

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Note: This is a tentative listing. To learn about the finalized list of courses and scheduled times, plan to attend the course rollout luncheon at 11 a.m. on Thursday, October 28.
Thanks to everyone who submitted photos for our contest. We received over 50 entries, and it was very difficult to choose just three. We will most likely request to use others in future issues, so stand by for that. Congratulations to our three winners. Please drop by the Honors Program office to claim your prize: Free movie tickets!

1st Prize: “Rose and Flame”

By Jonathan Walker

Even though flames engulf this flower, the rose itself is not burning or harmed by the actual flames. The darkened edges of the petal come from the natural coloration of the rose and not from the actual burning of the petal. The rose is coated with ether, a very volatile chemical. As the ether evaporates and combuts, it forms a thin layer of evaporated gas. The liquid itself is not burning because in a liquid state the ether cannot be easily mixed with oxygen. The gas state instead allows for thorough saturation of the evaporated ether with oxygen, making the gas highly combustible. This thin layer acts as a barrier, keeping the heat and the flame away from the surface of the rose. This effect is only maintained as long as there remains some liquid ether left on the surface of the rose. The gas evaporates so quickly that it is able to replenish the layer of gas being consumed from the flame. Without the liquid ether, the flame consumes the thin layer of shielding gas, exposing the rose to the heat of the flame. In addition, the petal orientation of the rose prevents the flower from burning. The rose petals are relatively vertical in terms of their orientation, preventing the rising hot air from burning any part of the rose.
2nd Prize: “Off the Coast of Étretat, France”
By Christopher Simpson

3rd Prize: “Funny Face”
By Allison Roberts