What is innovation and why do we need so much of it? When did it become a goal in itself rather than a tool in a necessary situation? The latest spin on higher education tells students they need to learn to innovate, innovate, innovate to make it in today’s world. This makes me nervous. A couple of cases in point: (1) I was talking to an engineer about my concern over the decline of pollinating insects in the world. He said, “Oh well, if they all disappear we’ll just figure out another way to pollinate the plants.” (2) Several students in one of my classes believed we could engineer a water-distribution system that would be as efficient as rain (in case of a prolonged drought).

You see the danger. The notion is that we don’t really have to worry about prophylaxis, that we can just allow systems to fail because we can always kluge together a solution afterwards. This is what I call engineering mentality, and it makes me nervous. It’s too glib. It lacks perspective. One of the questions on the Georgia Tech application for this year asked what invention a student would come up with if they could design anything. I’ve been reading a lot of these essays in my quest for new Honors Program students. Want to know the number one invention of choice? A time machine. Yup. Some others: A product to make your hair stay perfect all the time, a sensor for speed bumps so they can sink into the ground if you’re going the speed limit, a combination washer/dryer. I seem to remember an InVenture Prize finalist one year who was designing an individual coffee maker to carry around with you. And then there are the smart phone apps. Don’t get me started.

I’ve been doing an informal survey among students I teach. None can sew. Ninety percent can’t recognize edible fruit—mulberries, persimmons, pawpaw—on trees that grow around Atlanta. Even fewer know how to plant a tree. How about some life skills to go along with that inventiveness? You can’t find an app to replace a shirt button. You can’t sit in the shade of your iPad.

The View From Here

by Dr. Monica Halka

A few weeks ago, I got the chance to go to Kingston, Ontario, in Canada to attend the Tangible, Embedded, and Embodied Interaction (TEI) conference, thanks in no small part to the Georgia Tech Honors Program Challenge Fund. And let me say that it was fantastic! TEI is an extremely intimate conference with less than 200 people in attendance, yet those who attend are definitely the people you would want to meet if you’re interested in tangible computing. I met everyone from the cofounders of the field to the scientist whose research publications are the basis for all tabletop interaction research. But, TEI isn’t just a series of paper sessions and talks, it is also an exhibition of an extensive set of demos that the labs put together to showcase their work. I not only got to hear about interesting work, but I also got to operate and interact with it. On top of all of that, one of the days is dedicated to a series of workshops, and in the one I chose, we designed and built flexible circuits. I actually made a glove that lights up when you high five someone wearing another identical glove! If you’re looking for a great opportunity to both learn about tangible computing and network with innovators in the field, I’d highly suggest TEI 2013 in Barcelona.
A unique aspect of the Honors Program is the Challenge Fund, a program that allows HP participants to get funding for various ventures. Past Challenge Fund recipients have studied abroad, participated in mission trips, and coordinated events for local children. HP students are characteristically ambitious, which explains why thirteen students were awarded Challenge Fund dollars for the spring 2012 semester. Of the thirteen recipients, two particularly stood out: Jordan Lockwood, a business administration and public policy major, and Barry Weaver, a physics major. Both truly had applications that embodied the HP spirit of diversity and service, respectively.

This upcoming summer, Jordan will be participating in the Oxford-in-Residence Program, a Georgia Tech sponsored student abroad program that allows students to travel to Oxford, England, to study at Worcester College at Oxford University with Georgia Tech faculty members. Jordan hopes to “gain a more global perspective while studying abroad.” He looks forward to taking courses that count towards the basic requirements of his majors within a special international context as well as attending the 2012 summer Olympics.

While Jordan is preparing to leave for Oxford, Barry, along with other volunteers, will be making around 500 sandwiches for the Open Doors Community, a homeless and rehabilitation center in Midtown, for the third time this semester! Barry’s first sandwich-making event occurred February 21; the next two will take place on March 27 and April 3 in the student center. Be sure to stop by to assist Barry in his valiant effort to alleviate hunger and homelessness in the Atlanta area.

Although these projects are very different, both students are representing the Honors Program, Georgia Tech, and themselves through service and international learning. The Challenge Fund offers an opportunity for students to express themselves and help others, so if you have a worthwhile project or initiative, visit the Honors Program’s website and apply for the Challenge Fund!
Recap: 2012 Karlovitz Lecture

by Blake Carson

The first activity the committee hosted was an afternoon at Piedmont Park, where everyone played soccer, frisbee, and kickball. The HPPSPA board members also brought cookies, sandwiches, and drinks for everyone. All in all, the event was a success. Even the weather cooperated — the January day was warm and sunny.

Tickets to Les Misérables have already been purchased:

Group service projects:
- at some Monica's restaurants
- at the Fox Theater and
- at some Monica's restaurants
- at the Fox Theater and
- at some Monica's restaurants

Future events planned by the committee include the laser show at Stone Mountain, Les Misérables at the Fox Theatre, and group service projects.

Tickets to Les Misérables have already been purchased:

Future events planned by the committee include the laser show at Stone Mountain, Les Misérables at the Fox Theatre, and group service projects.

Tickets to Les Misérables have already been purchased:

Future events planned by the committee include the laser show at Stone Mountain, Les Misérables at the Fox Theatre, and group service projects.

Tickets to Les Misérables have already been purchased:

Future events planned by the committee include the laser show at Stone Mountain, Les Misérables at the Fox Theatre, and group service projects.
Message From The Director
by Dr. Gregory Nobles

The Arts At Tech—The Arts Are Tech

A couple of weeks ago, I had a terrific Georgia Tech two-fer in less than twenty-four hours, and it reminded me of something very important about this institution—and about you.

On Thursday night, I went to Poetry at Tech, the regular poetry reading that’s been run for over a decade by Tom Lux, who holds the Bourne Chair in Poetry, and who’s been bringing some of the best poets in America to Tech, two or three at a time, six times a year, for what has become one of my favorite campus events. (Do you know, by the way, that Georgia Tech has not just one, but two endowed chairs in poetry—the Bourne Chair and the McEver Chair? Yeah, most other people don’t either, and most people certainly don’t associate poetry with Georgia Tech. Not yet, anyway.) On that Thursday evening, we heard fine readings from Bruce McEver himself (a Tech alum who donated the chair that bears his name and who is a well-published poet in his own right—and who is co-teaching a very successful course this semester in the Honors Program, thanks), Chris Forhan, and Theresa Davis, who closed out the evening with a house-rocking poetry-slam performance that sent us away gleefully reeling from the force of the spoken word.

The next day, I took in the Art Crawl at CULC, a four-floor, room-after-room extravaganza of all sorts of student work—sculpture, painting, photography, video, and, once again, spoken-word performance—almost more than I could fathom in an afternoon. Happily, some of the pieces are still on display, and we can now go back and have a second look with a little more leisure.

Thinking about these two back-to-back arts events, and thinking also about all the other outlets for artistic expression here—the Ferst Center, DramaTech, Under the Couch, Erato, The North Avenue Review, Georgia Tech Orchestra, Chorale, all the a capella groups, the Crafts Center, not to mention all the personal and informal creativity—I realize how very critical the arts are to the life of the campus. Art at Tech is not just an ancillary activity, not just an admirable add-on or relaxing alternative to technical education. It’s something central to what makes—and keeps—us human within this larger technical context, something that defines the human essence of this institution, something we need to showcase and celebrate even more than we do.

I have a hopeful notion that the arts become a bigger part of the larger Georgia Tech narrative. I hope, for instance, that when I trail a campus tour group on the walkway between Skiles and CULC, I’ll hear the guide talk not just about the square-footage and Starbucks in CULC, or the Mickey Mouse clock on Skiles. “Here’s where we have all sorts of student artwork,” the guide can say, “and over there is the office for Poetry at Tech. And hey, do you know that we have not just one, but two endowed chairs in poetry at Tech?”

That’ll be a good day.