

Georgia Institute of Technology
New Student Convocation Address: What You Can Expect at Georgia Tech
G.P. "Bud" Peterson, President
August, 15 2009

August 16, 2009—Thank you Dr. Schafer.

Good evening! It's my great pleasure to welcome you to Georgia Tech.

Today you join one of the largest, best qualified and most diverse fall classes in Tech's history—and we are expecting great things from you.

This past year, our Freshman applications were up 15%—we had nearly 12,000 applications for 2,700 slots.

Just getting in Tech is quite an accomplishment, but more importantly is what you do while you are here.

Today marks an important milestone in your life. As you join us, you are beginning a transformational time, one where you can grow, meet new people, explore new things and find yourself.

For most of you, this is an entirely new experience. You are away from home for more than a few days, perhaps for the first time. You are surrounded by people you do not know, from places you have never heard of, with ideas and perspectives you have never even considered.

Your room in the residence hall looks different from your room back home, perhaps smaller, not quite as well furnished—and most of you will have to share it with someone! Just a note here—this past year we had several students who were featured on Oprah for having the messiest dorm rooms in America. They got their rooms professionally decorated, but don't count on that!

An Institute like this is comprised of many things, but like any organization, the most important aspect is the people. This is a wonderful place with more than 5,700 faculty, staff and support personnel, all here to help you have a safe, exciting and challenging college experience.

As you start this new chapter in your lives, I hope you are as excited to be here as we are to have you.

As you begin your Tech experience, I want you to consider three questions. First, what is reasonable for you expect from us? Second, what can we expect of you? And third, what is it that you hope to accomplish while you are here at Georgia Tech?

First, what can you expect of us? You can expect: excellent faculty engaged in groundbreaking research and innovative teaching, an enormously talented student body with a strong work ethic and a positive "can do" attitude, and a beautiful 400-acre metropolitan campus.

You can expect a growing campus. Since my arrival the first of April, I have participated in

- the formal opening of the Marcus Nanotechnology Building that will allow us to expand important research in that field
- and the groundbreaking for the Zelnak Basketball Practice Facility that will provide much needed practice space for both the men's and women's teams.

- Construction is now under way for the G. Wayne Clough Undergraduate Learning Center.
- All of these are visible reminders of the wonderful resources ahead for Tech students, faculty, and staff.
- You can expect to live, learn and work in a challenging and high-quality academic environment, one that will stretch you and challenge you—one with new experiences, both inside and outside the classroom.

You can expect choices. Through our colleges of Architecture, Computing, Engineering, Management, Sciences, and the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, Georgia Tech offers coursework leading to degrees in 36 undergraduate majors, 6 undesignated bachelor of science degrees, 47 master's programs, and 30 doctoral programs as well as preparatory programs for law, dental, medical, and veterinary schools.

This is a big place and while that is a little scary at first, it is a good thing, because it offers you a tremendous breadth of opportunities.

You can expect classmates that are adventurous and have a zest for life. They, and you are change agents and quick thinkers.

You can expect classmates that take their education seriously, set high expectations for themselves in all their activities, and take responsibility for their actions.

You can expect classmates who see the world as something bigger than themselves, as something bigger than "YouTube" moments.

That is what you can expect from your Institute. Georgia Tech is a research institute—we use that term more than "university." What does this mean? It means that we are all working, as we always have, to answer some of the world's most challenging questions. You are now a part of that tradition. You will be working side by side with some of the world's most renowned scholars. Talk to them—ask them questions. Be persistent in your pursuit of knowledge. Georgia Tech faculty are very interested in seeing you succeed.

Georgia Tech offers a globally-minded education. You can explore global challenges from the Atlanta campus or experience life around the globe. Georgia Tech has a campus or study abroad program all over the world. Take advantage of that opportunity.

Now, what can we expect of you?

We hope that we can expect that you will take care of yourselves and your friends. That you will make wise choices about your personal safety and health. As a "newly minted" Tech student, sometimes referred to as RATs (Recently Acquired Tech Students), you have new freedoms, new challenges, but with these, also come new responsibilities—just as you have responsibilities related to your academic endeavors, so too, do you have responsibilities related to your social interactions.

While we take our responsibilities for your growth, and your academic and personal success very seriously, the principal responsibility is yours. Your success depends on you and the decisions that you will be making in the coming days, weeks, months and years.

There are 168-hours in a week, you are typically in class 15 to 18 hours. That leaves 150 hours for other things. While I'd like to think you are studying for some of that time, there is a great deal of

what I like to call the "other education,"—education that occurs through opportunities outside the classroom and through your interactions with other people.

As newcomers to this campus community, it is important that you determine what values are most important to you, and how you will use this opportunity to shape your future.

Be sensible in the way you behave and take care of each other. If you are with people who are participating in risky behavior, urge them to stop, and if they are in danger do not hesitate to reach out for help.

I mentioned that you are part of the largest and one of the best qualified classes in our history. You also are members of one of our most diverse classes ever. It's vital that we nurture an inclusive environment for everyone in our community.

Our student body comes from 111 countries and all 50 states. You represent a diversity that includes geographic origin, social and economic backgrounds, race and ethnicity, special talents, differing viewpoints, and personal achievements—get to know them.

I expect, and we expect, that everyone in our community will help to create and maintain an environment that welcomes others, regardless of their differences, for it is these very differences that make us stronger and make this such a unique and exciting environment.

Finally, I would like to ask you to think about what you would like to accomplish during your time at Georgia Tech. While finals seem like a long way away, and graduation even further, they will both be here before you know it—so take some time, be introspective, talk with those closest to you about what it means to be a student at Tech and what it is that you want to accomplish during your time here.

I want to share a concept from the recent book *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell that talks about outstanding achievers in all sorts of fields. In he says that there is no such thing as an overnight success. Gladwell points out that studies revealed that it takes 10,000 to master something, almost anything—that goes for composers, basketball players, writers, ice skaters, concert pianists, computer scientists and chess masters, just about anyone. One example he cites is the Beatles.

Last night Paul McCartney played in Piedmont Park. When the Beatles came to the U.S. in 1964 they were deemed an overnight success. They had, in fact been playing together for 7 years, including more than 1,200 performances in Hamburg, Germany—over 10,000 hours practicing and playing together.

If you look ahead to your time here at Tech, you'll have more than 10,000 hours. The question is, what will you do with it? It's not just about the classroom. We're working to design an education experience that will help you become the type of people you will be the rest of your lives.

Determine your goals, identify your aspirations and work to accomplish them. Your college experience—your time here at Tech—will be what you make of it. You will shape it and it will shape you.

In the days and weeks ahead, remember that you are not alone here. You are part of a community, and there are many people who are committed to helping you succeed. Don't hesitate to ask for help or advice when you need it.

My biggest hope is that each and every one of you will excel here and that we will celebrate your commencement and graduation in just a few short years. You are starting down a path to become important contributors to the communities in which you will live and work.

Many of you will go on to shape and change the state, the nation, and in fact the world—in your lifetimes, you will resolve global climate change, make interplanetary travel a reality, and cure cancer. And you will do so because of the path you chose while here at Georgia Tech. Make the most of it.

As our newest students you are now part of a worldwide family that represents the white and gold of Georgia Tech.

On behalf of the entire Institute, we welcome you to the Georgia Institute of Technology—we are glad that you are here.