

Examining Academic Diversity

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Since initiating the strategic planning process last fall, I have often been asked: “Given the rapidly changing world in which they will live, how can Georgia Tech continue to prepare its students with the critical skills and knowledge base required to ensure that they will be successful in their careers?” At its core, this is a question of the role of academic diversity in the Georgia Tech curricula and one that we are trying to answer as part of our strategic planning process.

I believe that as competition for jobs and resources becomes more focused globally, there will be an increasing need for Georgia Tech graduates to maintain a competitive edge. Engineers will be required to have a command of more than just a traditional skill set to compete effectively in tomorrow’s marketplace. Our objective, therefore, is to understand what has in the past, and what will in the future, differentiate our students and ensure that we are preparing our students for this competitive environment.

One of the ideas being considered by the *Redesigning Education Strategic Vision Subcommittee* is to add new areas of study to better equip our graduates with the adaptability and flexibility they will need to succeed in the increasingly global environment. We need to provide our students with opportunities to examine new languages, cultures and studies in policy, law and health-related areas – along with the critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary for them to adapt and succeed throughout their careers.

As part of this process, we are investigating how to modify our curricula so that students can develop a broader range of capabilities, without losing the focus and challenges provided by a technological university. The ability to think critically, solve problems and exhibit leadership are just some of the skills that are as vital as those acquired in one’s own discipline. Some majors on campus already allow more interdisciplinary flexibility in their core classes, and we are looking at ways to incorporate more flexibility across all disciplines.

While there are arguments on both sides of this issue, our aim is to enhance the curricula with the technical and humanistic skills students need to be contributors to society, stewards of knowledge and global citizens. Graduates with a broader, more comprehensive knowledge base can innovate more effectively and solve problems by looking at them from different perspectives.

During these difficult economic times, we need to make tough decisions. In order to modify or add to existing curricula, something has to change. Those of you who are engineering majors already have a packed course load, so how do we adapt your education to reflect the changing nature of the marketplace, without increasing the length of time that it takes to get an engineering degree?

There are no easy answers to these questions and no major decisions have been made, but these are the types of important discussions that are ongoing as part of the strategic planning process. I urge you to take advantage of the Institute’s efforts to chart our future course, get involved and have your voice, the student voice, heard.