Thomas Earns Top Faculty Honor

Mathematics Professor Named Class of 1934 Distinguished Professor

VICTOR ROGERS
INSTITUTE COMMUNICATIONS

Robin Thomas has a remarkable record of teaching, service, and research. He is a Regents Professor, recipient of the Neuron Award for Lifetime Achievement in Mathematics, and a member of the 2012 inaugural class of American Mathematical Society Fellows. He has more than 100 papers appearing in top journals, and he has been awarded the Fulkerson Prize for outstanding papers in the area of discrete mathematics. Twice. This accomplishment has been matched by only four other researchers in the history of the prize.

Thomas is now the recipient of Georgia Tech’s highest award given to a faculty member: the Class of 1934 Distinguished Professor Award. “This award is special because it’s from Georgia Tech,” Thomas said. “I’ve been at Georgia Tech for over 25 years, so receiving this award means a lot to me.”

The Class of 1934 Distinguished Professor Award recognizes outstanding achievement in teaching, research, and service. Instituted in 1984 by the Class of 1934, the award is the highest honor given to a Georgia Tech faculty member.

Thomas Earns Top Faculty Honor

INVENTURE EVOLVES

This year, Georgia Tech’s InVenture Prize spawned the creation of the ACC InVenture Competition, where students from all 15 Atlantic Coast Conference schools faced off in an innovation competition. Each school held a local competition to determine participants for the ACC event. In the ACC event, Duke University and University of Virginia won first and second place, respectively, and Tech’s FireHUD won the People’s Choice Award. The FireHUD team, made up of Zack Braun and Tyler Sisk, won first place at Tech’s 2016 InVenture Prize for the development of a real-time monitoring system and Head Up Display (HUD) that delivers biometric and environmental data that can save lives by letting firefighters know their level of risk.

The ACC contest will be held annually with a different host school each year, following a second year at Georgia Tech in 2017. Learn more at www.inventure.gatech.edu and www.accinventure.gatech.edu.

Campus Preps for Spring Commencement

KRISTEN BAILEY
INSTITUTE COMMUNICATIONS

In a matter of weeks, more than 3,000 degrees will be conferred upon new graduates of Georgia Tech during the 251st Commencement.

Ceremonies and events start to honor graduates starting as early as April 15. Commencement ceremonies will take place on campus May 6 and 7. Spring graduates will hear from three distinguished guest speakers. Friday evening, John Holdren, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, will address master’s and Ph.D. students. On Saturday, Mary Rockett Brock, co-owner of the Atlanta Dream and co-chair of Campaign Georgia Tech, will address the morning group of bachelor’s recipients. Penny Pritzker, Secretary of Commerce, will address the afternoon group.

Details for Institute Commencement exercises and events are below. Faculty and staff are invited to participate in Commencement as volunteers. Opportunities are available on both Friday, May 6, and Saturday, May 7. If interested, visit www.c.gatech.edu/commvolunteer.

For more information, visit www.commencement.gatech.edu.

Ph.D. Hooding Ceremony
Friday, May 6, 10 – 11:30 a.m.
McCammish Pavilion

President’s Graduation Celebration
Friday, May 6, 3 – 5 p.m.
Tech Lawn

Ph.D. and Master’s Ceremony
Friday, May 6, 7 – 9 p.m.
McCammish Pavilion

Bachelor’s Morning Ceremony
Saturday, May 7, 9 – 11:30 a.m.
McCammish Pavilion

Bachelor’s Afternoon Ceremony
Saturday, May 7, 3 – 5:30 p.m.
McCammish Pavilion

Earth Day Takes Over Tech Walk April 22

Georgia Tech’s annual Earth Day celebration is one of the largest in the region. Stop by from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. for food, activities, donation drives, Captain Planet, and more. www.earthday.gatech.edu

Getting Materials from the Library Service Center

Most of the Georgia Tech Library’s collection is now housed six miles away. What if you need a book? The Library explains its new online search and retrieval system in a few easy steps. Learn more at www.c.gatech.edu/getabook

IN THIS ISSUE

Stamps Gift Expands Student Scholarship Program
Faculty and Staff Achievements
Hidden Georgia Tech: Backstage at DramaTech
Events

Arts & Culture

April 17
Georgia Tech’s four choirs and the Georgia Tech Symphony Orchestra join forces to perform Requiem, Op. 30, at 3 p.m. in the Ferst Center for the Arts. Admission is free.

www_ARTS_gatech.edu

Health & Wellness

April 14
VOICE hosts the third annual Teal Ribbon Day to show support for survivors of sexual violence. All employees are encouraged to wear the teal ribbon received via campus mail to show support.

www_voice.gatech.edu

April 30
The Georgia Tech Alumni Association hosts the 44th annual Pi Mi Road Race, one of the longest continually held 5Ks in Atlanta. The event begins at 7 a.m.

www_postdocs.gatech.edu

Training

April 15
The Office of Postdoctoral Services hosts a session on financial planning for postdoctoral fellows, from 10 to 11 a.m. in Room 129, Clough Commons.

www_POSTDOCS.gatech.edu

April 20
The Library hosts an Illustrator for Commons.

10 to 11 a.m. in Room 129, Clough Commons.

www_c.gatech.edu/pimile2016

Seminars & Lectures

April 14
Sara Stearns, executive vice president of memory technology for SanDisk, will discuss “Head in the Cloud: Computing and Storage in the Connected World” from 11 a.m. to noon in the Van Leer Auditorium.

www.ece.gatech.edu

April 15
Alumnus Ryan Gravel, whose master’s thesis was the impetus for Atlanta BeltLine, gives a talk and signs copies of his new book, Where We Want to Live, from 2 to 5 p.m. in the Reinhart-Fierse Family Auditorium, East Architecture Building.

EVENTS continued on page 3

Events, Graduate Students Clarify Advising Expectations

AMELIA PAVLIK
GRADUATE EDUCATION AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

Inconsistent. That’s one of the first words that comes to Ph.D. student Sahil Shah’s mind when asked about the experience he and his friends have had with advisors.

“I think a lot of it has to do with how a faculty member was advised when he or she was a graduate student,” said Shah, a student in Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE). “Those who had an advisor who treated them with respect and mentored them tend to do the same with their students. And then there are the professors who weren’t treated that way, and now do the same to their students.”

This is one of the reasons members of the Georgia Tech community have created a document of guidelines, known as the Mutual Expectations of Research Advisors and Advisees, to serve as a starting point in the Institute’s efforts to improve advisor and advisee relationships.

In 2014, the Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Faculty Development hosted two focus groups, which included both students and faculty members, to learn more about what each party thought it should expect from the other in these relationships.

The mutual expectations document was shaped based on these conversations and additional feedback, and was recently adopted by Georgia Tech’s Faculty Governance and Graduate Student Government Association.

“Our graduate students want accountability for effective advising at Tech, and our faculty members expect communication and commitment from their advisees,” said Susan Cozzens, vice provost of Graduate Education and Faculty Development. “We hope that both advisors and advisees will read through the document and consider whether the suggested expectations could be applied in their relationships going forward.”

For example, some of the expectations mentioned for an advisor include helping students build professional networks and providing guidance on professional and ethical standards. Suggested expectations for students include understanding that mentoring is tailored for each student and adjusted for progress in the degree program. Students are also expected to take feedback seriously and revise work accordingly.

Jennifer Hasler, a professor in ECE and Shah’s advisor, has watched 12 of her students move on to faculty positions at various universities during her 19 years at Tech. She thinks that this document is a step in the right direction toward sparking conversations about how to improve these relationships.

“It’s important for us to be able to communicate our expectations to students and for them to know what’s acceptable,” Hasler said. “If we want to have a stronger, more collegial campus community, we need to take more steps like this to foster healthy advisor-advice relationships.”

Stamps Gift Transforms Signature Student Scholarship Program

STACY BRAUWAN
OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT

In 2006, the Stamps Family Charitable Foundation launched the Stamps Leadership Scholars program inside the President’s Scholarship Program at Georgia Tech to support merit scholarships for the most promising undergraduate students from across the nation. Now, the Stamps Foundation is more than doubling its annual grant to ensure that every President’s Scholar will have the same opportunities provided under the current Stamps Leadership Scholars program.

The latest gift from the family foundation, led by Penny and E. Roe Stamps IV (ECE 1967, MS IE 1972, HON Ph.D. 2014), means that every student in the President’s Scholars Program — approximately 40 freshmen each year — will receive funding equal to the full cost of attendance for four years (including tuition, fees, books, full room and board, and a stipend for miscellaneous living expenses) plus a laptop and enrichment experiences such as outdoor leadership programs, research and internship opportunities, and at least one international experience, up to $15,000 over four years.

The President’s Scholarship Program will be renamed the Stamps President’s Scholars Program in recognition of the Stamps philanthropy. Under the expanded program, the Institute will continue to provide scholarship support at the current President’s Scholarship level through income from permanent endowments established by individual donors and funding from institutional resources. The Institute will continue to press forward with its ultimate goal to fully endow the President’s Scholarships as they are currently defined, offsetting the funding required from Institute resources.

As part of their scholarship, Stamps Scholars participate in activities to give back to their communities. Georgia Tech’s Stamps President’s Scholars will participate in the first Stamps National Day of Service on April 16, along with peers at 17 other colleges and universities around the country. Georgia Tech’s group will volunteer with the Atlanta Community Food Bank, working in its community garden.

Learn more about the Stamps President’s Scholars at www.psp.gatech.edu.
of 1934 in observance of its 50th reunion, the award is presented to an active professor who has made significant, long-term contributions — colleagues who have brought widespread recognition to the professor, to his or her school, and to the Institute. The award includes a stipend of $20,000. Letters of support for Thomas’ nomination came from world-renowned senior researchers familiar with the significance of his work, former Ph.D. students who wrote of his record as a teacher and mentor, and former postdoctoral fellows who praised his ability to develop young researchers.

Dean of Tech’s College of Sciences Paul Goldbart said, “Robinson is a shining star in the international firmament of modern mathematics—a brilliant researcher, inspiring mentor, superb instructor, and treasured colleague. Just today, I had the pleasure of hearing from one of our mathematics graduate students about a glorious contribution of Robinson’s to another famous four-color problem of map and graph theory.”

Research in Discrete Mathematics

Before coming to Tech in 1989, Thomas worked at Bellcore, a telecommunication research and development company.

“The reason I came here is because Georgia Tech made me an offer I could not refuse,” he said. “I was technically working in industry, but, in reality, I was also doing my own research. So, in that sense, the research part was not that different.”

Thomas’ research in discrete mathematics is concentrated in the fields of graph theory and combinatorics, areas with applications across a wide span, from engineering and computer science to economics, biology, and social science. The issues being researched are often motivated by real-world problems in telephone network design, airline scheduling, online auctions, and Internet design and searching. Many of the problems solved by Thomas and his collaborators were open for several decades and had successfully resisted the best efforts of his colleagues for many years.

Thomas also is director of Tech’s Algorithms, Combinatorics, and Optimization (ACO) program, an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program linking the College of Computing, the School of Mathematics, and the H. Milton Stewart School of Industrial and Systems Engineering. About half of ACO Ph.D. students go into academia and the others go into industry.

Thomas has graduated 16 Ph.D. students at Tech, and he has been an informal advisor to many others.

In receiving the Class of 1934 Distinguished Faculty Award, he joins ACO colleagues Dick Lipton (Computer Science) and George Nemhauser (Industrial and Systems Engineering), who were honored with the award in 2012 and 2013, respectively.

Persevering with ALS

In 2008, Thomas was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as ALS or Lou Gehrig’s disease. The disease is characterized by rapid muscle weakness, a gradual decrease in muscle strength, resulting in difficulty speaking, swallowing, and eventually breathing.

“It’s a progressive disease, where I’m gradually losing the use of my legs and other functions,” said Thomas, who uses a motorized wheelchair to get around.

“I had to completely change the way I deliver lectures,” said Thomas, who is on a motorized wheelchair to get around. “I did not expect, he answers it and asks for a student volunteer to write the answer on the white board. He also has a teaching assistant to help him prepare for class. Although Thomas’ body is failing him, his mind remains sharp and focused.

“There are lots of ongoing research projects that I would like to finish,” he said. “In terms of career moves, I don’t have any aspirations to be a department chair or anything similar. I’m quite happy with running the ACO Program.”

RSVP For Annual Luncheon

Thomas, along with many other faculty and staff members, will be honored at Tech’s annual Faculty and Staff Honors Luncheon on Friday, April 22, from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the Student Center Ballroom. The event will recognize those who have received Institute awards and accolades during the past year. The deadline to RSVP is Wednesday, April 13.

Michael Roeder, director of the Office of Human Resources, said, “It is a wonderful opportunity to recognize the contributions and achievements of the fantastic people who work here at Georgia Tech.”

Events

The Georgia Tech Library hosts a Patents Search Class for researchers, from 2:30 to 4 p.m. in the Homer Rice Center, Library.

Randy Hiltz.

MISCELLANEOUS

April 18

The annual Student Honors Celebration recognizes students who have achieved academic and scholastic excellence in their programs of study. The celebration takes place from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at the Student Center and Fertz Center for the Arts.

www.specialevents.gatech.edu

April 19

Georgia Tech Baseball hosts Mercer University at 6 p.m. at Russ Chandler Stadium.

www.ramblerweck.com

April 20

Learn about the recent ideas competition to design the Living Building at Georgia Tech, featuring representations from The Kendeda Fund and the three design teams who participated in the competition, from 5:30 to 7:45 p.m. in the Clough Undergraduate Learning Commons.

www.livingbuilding.gatech.edu

April 21

All members of the Tech community are invited to honor LGBTQIA graduates at the annual Lavender Graduation celebration, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. in the Gordy Room, Wardlaw Center. RSVP at www.lgbtqia.gatech.edu

April 23

The Westside Communities Alliance hosts a Fifth Anniversary Symposium to showcase its work, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Historic Academy of Medicine at Georgia Tech. The event is free. RSVP at www.v.hrs.gatech.edu

April 25-26

Final Instructional Class Days. No tests or quizzes may be administered.

April 27

The Office of Human Resources hosts its annual Bank at Work Day, from noon to 1 p.m. in Room 320, Student Center.

www.ohr.gatech.edu

April 28 – May 5

Final Exams. Reading periods take place April 27-28 and May 4.

For a more comprehensive listing of events, or to add your own, visit calendar.gatech.edu.
HIDDEN GEORGIA TECH:

Georgia Tech’s student-run theater, DramaTech, is the oldest continuously operating theater in Georgia. The Institute’s first dramatic organization started in 1913. The group disbanded during World War II, but in 1947 a group of theater supporters created the Georgia Tech Dramatic Club. For years, DramaTech presented its plays in a variety of venues, including the YMCA, Fowler Street School Auditorium, and an old church at Hemphill and Ferst Streets. Since 1992, DramaTech’s Dean James E. Dull Theatre has been adjoined to the Robert Ferst Center for the Arts. Let’s go backstage.

(1) DramaTech adjoined the Robert Ferst Center for the Arts in 1992, thanks to Dean of Students Emeritus James E. Dull. (2) All manner of costume accessories fill the DramaTech drawers. (3) Before going on stage, performers touch former DramaTech Director Greg Abbott’s handprint for luck. (4) The cast and crew of each show make their mark on the bricks along DramaTech’s stairwell. (5) The dressing room has lockers to store the actors’ personal belongings while they’re on stage. (6) Actors are often superstitious. After two consecutive plays in a variety of venues, including a toaster as a prop, it became tradition to include a toaster in every show — for luck. (7) In the early days of theater, the actors’ lounge was painted green. DramaTech’s green room follows that tradition.

See more behind the scenes at www.c.gatech.edu/dramatech. Or, see it all in person by attending DramaTech’s current production, The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee. The show runs Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 8 p.m., through April 23. Faculty/staff tickets are $10. More information at www.dramatech.org.