Members of our campus community have been working together diligently this fall to address some of the challenges brought to light by events earlier this semester. Last month, three Action Teams, each comprised of students, faculty, and staff, submitted detailed reports on Student Mental Health, Campus Culture, and LGBTQIA Community Support. As I mentioned during our follow-up meeting with the three groups, we are incredibly pleased with their work, and appreciate the insight and time investment from all of the team members. Upon receiving the reports, I asked Institute leaders serving in various areas of responsibility to look at ways to implement the more than 180 recommendations, and to take it a step further by exploring additional actions that would address some of the challenges identified by the teams, while building upon the ongoing progress. I am writing today to provide an end-of-semester update on some of the initiatives that will help to ensure that we continue to improve our campus environment.

As anticipated, there were several areas of overlap identified by the three teams. To maximize effectiveness and take a holistic approach, we have begun the process of engaging leadership from numerous groups in discussions about the Action Team recommendations. A significant number of cross-campus/departmental discussions are necessary to identify the best ways to implement the needed changes. To assist in the process, we have created the Path Forward Advisory Group to provide counsel in responding to and prioritizing the recommendations. The following individuals have agreed to serve on the Advisory Group:

- Jennifer Abrams, Development Assistant, Office of Development, Georgia Tech alumna, and former Student Government Association president
- Abheer Bipin, Mechanical Engineering, fourth year
- Steven Girardot, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, Georgia Tech alumnus
- Jenny Singleton, Professor and Assistant Vice Provost for Conflict Resolution and Advocacy
- Michael Vallecoccia, Program and Portfolio Manager, Strategic Consulting, Georgia Tech alumnus

Three of these individuals served as members of the initial Action Teams, and all are committed to helping ensure that these issues remain a priority. We anticipate that several of the Action Team members, as well as others in the Georgia Tech community, will interact with the Advisory Group members and continue to share ideas. The team will monitor progress, serve as a liaison with senior leadership, and partner to communicate updates with the campus community.

While our Action Teams were still hard at work this fall, a number of groups proactively implemented changes addressing several of the same issues identified by the teams. Some of these high-level actions include:

- Approval of up to $500,000 in matching funds by the administration to match the student government’s commitment of $500,000 in support of mental health initiatives
• Establishment of a $1 million endowment that will be used to support student health and well-being initiatives
• A $2.5 million endowment commitment from members of our Parents Board to create the Brandt-Fritz Dean of Students Chair (pending approval of the Board of Regents), with proceeds available to support student and mental health initiatives
• Suspension of the “16 visit” Counseling Center session limit
• Implementation planning and funding for a Healthy Minds Survey in spring semester
• Modification of the “dean on call” process to make it more welcoming and accessible to students in crisis
• Exploring new technology systems for better coordination and collaboration between the Counseling Center and Health and Well-Being
• Funding for a new full-time coordinator position in the LGBTQIA Resource Center, along with discussion on expanded physical space for the Center
• Ensuring that all gender-neutral bathrooms are available for use whenever a building is open

While some of the Action Teams’ recommendations will require additional planning, coordination, and investment, many can be implemented through immediate changes by our campus community.

Examples of some of these are listed below:

• We have received $4.5 million in new endowment commitments for mental health, as covered above.
• We will review staffing levels for caseworkers, clinicians, counselors, and psychiatrists to determine hiring needs, allocate required resources, and begin the hiring process.
• The search for a permanent Counseling Center director has begun, and the search committee will identify finalists as early as possible in the spring semester.
• When advertising open positions in the Counseling Center, we will ensure that they are also advertised in places that might yield a therapist with expertise in the areas of gender therapy and working with transgender students.
• We are increasing screenings for depression, and a higher priority has been placed on training for peer interaction and intervention in mental health concerns.
• We will conduct an organizational review of the LGBTQIA Resource Center, benchmarking it with peer institutions to adopt and implement best practices.
• We will work with Capital Planning and Space Management to allocate space for an expanded LGBTQIA Resource Center in the Smithgall Student Services Building.
• We will conduct a comprehensive audit to determine where existing restrooms can be modified to increase the number of available gender-neutral facilities across campus. (We currently do this for all new construction.)
• We will modify the existing LGBTQIA Advisory Board meeting schedule to include two meetings per year with the vice presidents for Student Life and Institute Diversity.
• We will conduct a thorough review and update of the Task Force on the Learning Environment recommendations and subsequent actions to determine what needs to be implemented or altered.
• We will determine what information exists that can be leveraged from existing surveys of Georgia Tech’s culture.
• We will explore options to expand the principles of the Georgia Tech Athletic Association’s Total Person Program campus wide.
• We will teach inclusive pedagogical practices to all new faculty at new faculty orientation, helping ensure that it is part of our culture.
• We will provide resources to amend the GT1000 and GT2000 curricula to focus on holistic development of our students.

As encouraging as this progress is, our work is far from done. We intend to continue discussing and building on the recommendations presented by the Action Teams through the coming spring semester in a variety of ways. First, the reports — and actions recommended in them — will be the focus of a Georgia Tech leadership retreat in January. Along with discussing the recommendations developed by the Action Teams, leaders will look for additional opportunities suggested in that work to make Georgia Tech the open, welcoming, and inclusive campus we all are committed to and envision, now and well into the 21st century. We plan to continue the conversation through a town hall in the spring, and listening sessions throughout 2018.

Finally, throughout the spring semester we will periodically report to the campus on the progress and additional commitments and plans as they are developed.

In many ways, this fall semester has been a time of challenge and growth for our campus community. I am continually encouraged by the conviction, commitment, and level of collaboration among our students, faculty, and staff to identify and address issues related to the continued health and well-being of our entire campus community.

We have learned much by listening and working together to develop creative solutions, and this will make Georgia Tech a better place, now and for years to come. Thank you again for your engagement, your compassion, and your patience as we continue our path forward, together.

G. P. “Bud” Peterson
President