

## Notes from the President

Georgia Institute of Technology

G.P. "Bud" Peterson, President

Commencement Caps the Close of Fall Semester 2017

12/21/17



Combine Fall Commencement, final exams, and holiday season festivities, and the result is one of the most energized months of the year at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Commencement is one of the true highlights of the year, a time when we send off our newest graduates into an exciting new chapter in their lives.

When we held **Georgia Tech's 254th Commencement ceremonies** Dec. 15-16 in McCamish Pavilion, I had the pleasure of shaking the hands of the 2,200 undergraduates and graduate students from summer and fall who participated in Commencement.

At Friday morning's Ph.D. ceremony, I was honored to have the opportunity to deliver the Commencement address as we recognized our 360 doctoral degree recipients. Since I served the unusual dual role as master of ceremonies and Commencement speaker, we were able to do away with the formality of an introduction! Because we were hooding all our Ph.D. graduates, I heeded Shakespeare's advice, recognizing that "brevity is the soul of wit," and tried to keep it short, at least as Commencement speeches go.

My message to graduates as they began the next step in their lives was three-pronged: the need to keep learning, the importance of partnering with others, and their responsibility to give back by mentoring others. As examples, I used some of my own mentors and experiences as a student and faculty member to help drive home my message. I am hopeful that some of these messages brought back some of their own experiences for our graduates as they made their

way through the rigors of Georgia Tech, but it never hurts to have one final review! The **Ph.D. ceremony and speech** can be viewed on Georgia Tech's YouTube channel.

At our master's and bachelor's degree ceremonies, we heard from two inspiring speakers. One of our own, **Dr. Gary B. Schuster**, the Vassar Woolley Professor Emeritus in Georgia Tech's School of Chemistry and Biology, spoke to the master's recipients at Friday afternoon's ceremony. As the **2017 recipient** of the Class of 1934 Distinguished Professor Award, Dr. Schuster has been recognized for outstanding achievement in teaching, research, and service. The award is the highest honor Georgia Tech bestows upon faculty members.

Just as he often does in his classes, Dr. Schuster surprised and delighted his audience, with a look at what he's learned from the deep insights of Nobel Prize-winning economists Friedrich von Hayek (1974), Daniel Kahneman (2002), and Richard Thaler (2017). Suggesting that most of our graduates will find themselves in leadership positions, he took us through the methods used by these brilliant men to attempt to reach the best possible decisions and outcomes. Always the teacher, Dr. Schuster gave the audience a typically thought-provoking message similar to the ones many on hand had been privileged to hear the past four or five years in his classes. If you missed it, or just want to revisit it, it's **available on our Georgia Tech YouTube Channel**.

**Dr. Mary Sue Coleman**, president of the Association of American Universities, addressed the Saturday-morning Commencement exercises for undergraduate degree recipients. A friend and admirer of Georgia Tech, Dr. Coleman has Georgia roots and spoke of them fondly in her speech. She weaved her memories of astronaut John Glenn's 1962 orbit of Earth with an appreciation of Georgia Tech graduate Shane Kimbrough's **recent six-month stint** as commander of the International Space Station, where he made sure that his Georgia Tech loyalty was prominently displayed by flying a pennant that once adorned Georgia Tech's cherished mechanical mascot, the Ramblin' Wreck!

Dr. Coleman eloquently echoed the sentiments of the Georgia Tech leadership when she declared, "I am an optimist. I always have been. I am an optimist because I believe in education, in science and technology, and in you, graduates of Georgia Tech, as the leaders of tomorrow." **Her complete speech** and the **undergraduate ceremony** can also be viewed on Georgia Tech's YouTube Channel. In addition, our news team has put together a **collection of "behind the scenes" stories** I think you'll enjoy that feature some of Georgia Tech's most recent graduates.

Even before Commencement, the Institute experienced a surge of momentum in the fall semester's closing weeks, reminding us again as we head into 2018 why it's great to be a Yellow Jacket!

- In ever-increasing numbers, students are applying, enrolling, and staying at Georgia Tech. For the ninth consecutive year, applications are up significantly. By this year's Oct. 15 Early Action undergraduate admission deadline, more than 18,000 students applied for admission to the 2018 class — a 15.6 percent increase over last year's Early Applications. A recent *Complete College Georgia* report shows that Tech's freshman-to-sophomore retention rate matched last year's record high of 97 percent. We also had a six-year graduation rate of 86 percent for the 2010 cohort, another all-time high.
- Georgia Tech has **a new Rhodes Scholar**, the sixth in the Institute's history. Calvin Runnels, a Baton Rouge, Louisiana, native, will graduate after only three years at Georgia Tech this

spring with a bachelor's degree in biochemistry. Next year, he'll begin postgraduate studies at the University of Oxford in England.

- During Homecoming weekend, we **celebrated the official naming** of the Roger A. and Helen B. Krone Engineered Biosystems Building. Ongoing research in the Krone EBB targets 12 types of diseases and at least 55 specific conditions affecting human health. Among these are research on eight types of cancer, 10 varieties of immune and inflammatory disease, 11 infectious agents, 10 types of neurological disease, and seven diseases correlated with specific genetic mutations. For the Krones, as with so many of our alumni, philanthropy and investing in higher education and the community are a way of life.
- **Our alumni's desire to see future Yellow Jackets benefit** from the same world-class education they received is exemplary. At the Homecoming reunion of the Old Gold Society — composed of Yellow Jackets from 50 years back (Class of 1967 and before) — I was pleased, but not surprised, to report that the classes of 1967, 1977, and 1992 presented the Institute with combined fundraising gifts of almost \$20 million. Year after year, our reunion classes demonstrate the incredible generosity of our alumni.
- **Our Georgia Tech faculty and staff** each year vigorously support the **State Charitable Contributions Program**, in which state employees partner with hundreds of nonprofits and charitable organizations. For the **past 10 years**, Georgia Tech has received the Governor's Cup, awarded annually to the state institution with the highest average contribution per employee.
- Georgia Tech's employees are problem solvers. After Hurricanes Irma and Maria ravaged the Caribbean this fall, our Office of Development created an **emergency scholarship fund** to help our students from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands stay enrolled at the Institute. The need is great, as some of their families continue to lack electricity three months after the hurricanes. Contributions are still welcome.
- Construction began in November on **The Kendeda Building for Innovative Sustainable Design**. The project is on track to become the Southeast's first Living Building Challenge 3.1-certified facility of its size and function.
- For the fifth straight year, Georgia Tech athletics posted its highest **NCAA Graduation Success Rate (GSR)** ever, coming in at 88 percent.

**G.P. "Bud" Peterson**  
**President**

A few photos from Commencement:





*Excitement grows as bachelor's candidates await the awarding of their degrees.*



*Dr. Gary B. Schuster, the Vassar Woolley Professor Emeritus in Georgia Tech's School of Chemistry and Biology, addressed the master's recipients at Friday afternoon's ceremony.*



*President G.P. "Bud" Peterson and first lady Val Peterson with bachelor's Commencement speaker Mary Sue Coleman (center), president of the Association of American Universities (AAU).*