On behalf of the more than 21,500 students and 6,500 faculty and staff of Georgia Tech, we welcome you here tonight. We’re glad you chose to participate in this FOCUS weekend that was designed to help you explore opportunities for your future, and in particular, graduate school.

You are part of the 22nd group that has participated in a FOCUS event at Georgia Tech in as many years. Counting you, there have been 2,000 students from throughout the U.S. to participate.

I hope you’ve had an opportunity to explore our 400-acre campus today as you visited with various departments. Many people are surprised to see this large and beautiful campus in the heart of Atlanta.

In addition to participating in Tech’s some 400 student organizations, students become involved in volunteer work and take advantage of cultural resources in Atlanta. Thousands of students take advantage of the partnership between Georgia Tech and the Woodruff Arts Center. For $20, they have an all-access season pass that can be used to reserve tickets at the Alliance Theatre and performances by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, as well as admission to the High Museum of Arts and its programs such as Friday Night Jazz and Conversations with Contemporary Artists.

This fall, we opened our new McCamish Pavilion, the home of Georgia Tech’s men’s and women’s basketball teams, and a site where we have commencement and other special events. Yesterday, we dedicated the Ken Byers Tennis Complex, which includes 16 indoor and outdoor courts with coatings the same as that used in the U.S. Open. While we are known for high academic standards, even graduate students are allowed to have a little fun once in a while!

There are some aspects of our campus that are trademark Georgia Tech. For example, you may have seen the Campanile fountain next to the student center. What you may not have noticed is that right next to the fountain is a rod with a
device on it that measures the wind velocity. It then controls the water flow to the fountain. The water from the fountain comes from a 1.4 million gallon cistern below the Tech Green area next to our new Clough Undergraduate Learning Center.

- That area of the campus was the site of a movie production this summer. Tech’s campus became Google’s headquarters for the filming of The Internship. Clough Commons had a slide and a spaceship inside, and bright green, red and yellow bicycles parked outside. Students ran into Vince Vaughn and Owen Wilson during the filming. I can’t promise you something that exciting, but I can tell you that there is some amazing work being done at Georgia Tech that is impacting not only our state, but also our nation and our world.

- Students at Georgia Tech are an active part of research and discovery, even at the undergraduate level. In fact, over 70 percent of invention disclosures name one or more students among the inventors. More than 40 percent of Georgia Tech inventors are either graduate or undergraduate students.

- Most young people today express an interest in making a real difference in our society. Graduate students in STEM areas and related fields are empowered to do it. Graduate education can be a life-changing opportunity—for you, and for the lives that you impact through your work while in graduate school and then upon receiving your advanced degree.

- Graduate students are able to engage in focused research, helping to develop solutions to real-world problems. One of the words used to describe the post-graduate environment at Tech is collegial. Graduate students have an opportunity to work alongside some of the world’s leading experts in a number of fields. In addition to benefitting from a strong mentoring relationship, they’re developing solutions to grand challenges while they’re still in school.

- When I came to Tech almost four years ago, people asked me why I decided to take the job. I told them that I believe solutions to the major problems faced by society today will be developed at places like Georgia Tech.
Education, and graduate education in particular, represents a significant investment of time and other resources on the part of the institution, as well as on the part of the student. For me, both personally and professionally, it was worth it.

As I thought about the decision many of you are facing, I thought back to my own graduate education at Texas A & M University in Mechanical Engineering. Ironically, if you were to ask me today what part of my major area of study prepared me for my current job, it would be the law of entropy, or the second law of thermodynamics, called the law of disorder. Systems tend to progress in the direction of increasing disorder. I think that is universal, and not something specific to academic environments!

And while I may not currently be using much of what I learned about mechanical engineering, I am benefitting from what I learned in college about discipline, perseverance, working as part of a team, the value of lifetime learning, and the importance of leadership. And, my graduate education opened doors that wouldn’t have been available to me otherwise. I have kept up with many of my colleagues, and they have become lifetime friends. I know that will be true for you as well.

I hope you will consider a graduate education, and wherever you choose to attend, I wish you the best. Let me assure you that should you decide to attend graduate school at Georgia Tech, we will do everything possible to invest in your future success.

Again, we’re glad you’ve joined us this weekend, and we hope to see you back.

Thank you. Now, please enjoy your dinner.