Students design their own vision of campus

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By Benjamin Small Columnist

Over the last semester, I’ve talked about why research projects that are taking place on campus. I’m sure you were captivated by the topics and the style in which they were written. But if what happened to not have a covered subject in which you’re interested? Well, lucky for you, this week’s topic is how to get yourself hooked-up with the research projects of your choice. (It could very well be the most gratifying hooked-up of your adolescent life.)

Not many look around. Nearly every group on campus has some web presence. All of the School’s websites contain sections on the research being conducted by their faculty. Moreover, GTRI and interdisciplinary research centers like the Microelectronics Research Center (MRC) have their own websites that outline the projects they support. Look around, everything’s normally organized by specialization.

Maybe you’ve even had a class with a professor who concentrates on a field you like. Professors’ websites generally mention their professional interests. As a last resort, you can even use one of the Library’s publication databases like INSPEC or the Web of Science from ISI to search for publications concerning your topic of interest and containing “Georgia Tech” in the address, then see who the first or last author is. (Traditionally, the group leader or principal investigator is listed last for works written by students.)

So find who heads the research effort in which you’re interested. Then, step two: contact that person. Email is of course the default and ubiquitous form of communication nowadays, especially in academia.

Most professors, especially the cool ones, receive hundreds of email messages daily. (Wowzers!) So you have to make yours stand out to get noticed. And D16 HS is nO ThE wHY O? Do IT (dude doesn’t care how 133t you are). Content—you should get his or her attention from the content of your inquiry. Sound educated (hopefully this won’t be a charade); become familiar with some of the group’s publications. You want to demonstrate that you would be an improvement (at least a small one) to the research efforts and that it’s worthwhile to invest resources in training you or introducing you to the lab.

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Get yourself hooked-up

‘Heist’ sneaks onto the screen

The Heist, opening this Friday, stars Gene Hackman as a retired professional thief forced into one last heist by Danny DeVito. Read the review in Entertainment. Page 19

Students cope with post-9-11 aftermath

By Madhu Adiga Contributing Writer

Nearly two months after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, faith continues to play a major part in students’ lives. Since many are quick to label the attacks as the acts of Muslims, and religion is a key topic of discussion. The issue runs deeper in the Georgia Tech community.

Tech students who practice any sort of religion are generally finding it to be a source of refuge in these times of crisis. “I’ve noticed most students calling on their faith during this time of hardship,” said Bobby Evans, a campus minister for the Georgia Tech Baptist Student Union (BSU). On September 11, BSU called a special time of prayer and encouragement for many students an opportunity to submit their own prayers.

At Eilander and Campus Fellowship (CCF), numbers surged during the first week or two after the attacks. Although a lot of the new people who showed up after the first week or two couldn’t give a reason for why people who have taken their faith more seriously as a result of what happened,” said Neal Baker, an assistant minister at CCF.

According to Evans, most ministers like himself are encouraging their congregations to deal with the terrorist attacks through personal prayer, rather than giving them any specific suggestions or instructions on how to handle it. They do stress certain parts of scripture, however. “In a small Bible study group we had recently, we focused on passages that dealt with loving your enemy,” said Evans.

On the evening of the attack, CCF held a prayerful candle display, not only for the victims and their loved ones but also for the government leaders and the decisions they would have to make. “The one thing we are stressing is a message of love towards everyone. This includes loving the enemy, as well as showing love and understanding towards those following the Muslim faith,” said Baker.

Not all people of faith are going to react to the attacks the same way, but I have seen many become stronger in their religious beliefs,” said Samin Rahman, President of the Bangladesh Student Association.

“On the same token, however, I have also seen people give up on their religious beliefs completely. I hear for many believe that there is still even a God If He would allow something horrific to happen to so many innocent lives.

Of all religious faiths, Islam seems to be the one that takes it the hardest.” With the attacks linked to the Taliban government in Afghanistan, followers of the Muslim faith have become targets of taunts, discrimination and harassment their congregations to deal with the issue in different ways.

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FOCUS

Technique • Friday, November 9, 2001 •

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By Gray Gunter Assistant Focus Editor

Finally, Georgia Tech students were given an opportunity to bring a vision of their own making to the community. Over a series of display boards, virtual video walkthroughs and floor maps, teams of architecture, engineering, and design students presented a series of projects for renewing the areas around the 75/85 connector and bridging the space above the highway. Simply put, the problem students faced was to reunite a divided city. In Atlanta’s case, the fault line is a stretch of the city as well as a mental barrier to how people view the city.

West of the interstate, the Georgia Tech campus has had the same view of the east, towards Peachtree Street, office towers and luxury condos are the norm. The actual distance separating these areas is small, but the obstacles between Tech and Midtown, both pedestrian and automobile, are considerable.

With this in mind, students at the College of Architecture set out to rework the damaged created by decades of building and abuse. The projects as

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entity. Such efforts are not uncommon anymore. Boston’s monumental construction, the ‘Big Dig’, and Seattle’s Freeway Parks, are prime examples of American cities working to take their interstates out of sight and bring every day life back into focus.

The issue of public space is important to Tech because it directly addresses the issue of how the Institute relates to the city and becomes part of the community. During the 1970s and 1980s the trend in urban college design was to protect the campus from the dangers of an encroaching city. Safety concerns are particularly evident in Atlanta where, for example, Georgia State’s academic buildings are connected by raised walkways and Tech’s campus is surrounded by a brick wall.

Recently, schools have integrated part of the city and the neighborhoods surrounding them into the college community. With this in mind, Professor Harris Dimitropoulos’ studio explored the ways in which public space, running over and parallel to the interstate, could connect Tech back to Midtown Atlanta. Students focused on the natural attraction of green space including mini-parks and tree-lined walkways. The more adventurous plans for the space above and across 75/85 included a soccer stadium, a series of basketball and tennis courts and a multilevel, multi-use building that spanned the entire highway. This concept, dubbed by student Steven Brown, “The Big Box Bridge,” is a structure housing a convenience-grocery store, a student athletic annex and a video rental store, with a parking lot on top. Brown describes the design as much more than just a building, “The Big Box becomes a street—a seamless connection between Georgia Tech and Midtown—active, diverse, interesting, and a great walk to the new Georgia Tech campus.”

The “Big Box” concept is notable because it contained within it three hot ideas in urban renewal. First, structures that crossed major highways and focused on pedestrianism. Second, designs that link universities with the city that surrounded them. And finally, the return of mixed-use buildings that reduce sprawl and traffic by bringing multiple needs of the public under one roof.

The final focus of the project, the task of bringing housing to the overpass, was given to Professor Athanasios Economou’s studio. Housing projects from this studio were concentrated between Tenth and Fifth Street to create an area of medium-rise residences for both students and the general public.

The boldest housing proposal from the class was Chris Henshaw’s Fourth Street Housing Bridge. The project is rooted in Henshaw’s view of what defines a ‘campus’. As he said in the project, “Expanding the campus east across the highway makes sense—it connects Georgia Tech to Midtown and it builds around—not away from—the historic core of the campus. But the Fifth Street campus is just a half-campus. No student housing equals no real campus.” The project would create a student dorm crossing over 75/85. The structure would serve as both a residence to students and a path to the new East Campus projects.

The ‘Re-Connector’ or ‘New Ground’ project isn’t a complete scheme for bringing Midtown and Tech together. It certainly isn’t a blueprint that the administration will be forced to follow. The project simply is a series of good ideas developed and designed to their fullest potential, ideas not founded by faculty or city planners, but by the students who experience the ramifications of the planning decisions normally made by outsiders. And who better to mold the vision of the future of Georgia Tech than the members of the Institute.
Tech student makes TopCoder semifinals

By Sreeman Narainnathan
Contributing Writer

Perhaps what the computer programmer needed most, excluding, of course, more processing power, was a company with a simple and sound mission statement demonstrating its desire to reverse the traditional stereotype encapsulating the profession.

That desire for social change became a reality in 2000, when a man named Jack Hughes founded TopCoder, a Connecticut-based company that regularly runs tournaments that bring the most skilled computer programmers in the country together. Contestants compete against one another to solve a variety of tasks in either the Java or C++ programming language.

This past Friday and Saturday, TopCoder hosted the first-ever $250,000 TopCoder Invitational Programming Tournament in Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, CT. It was just one of numerous rounds of tournaments in which members of the always expanding company compete. However, what makes this particular competition especially significant is that one of the finalists is a student at Georgia Tech. Trayton Otto, a second-year Computer Science major, competed in the semifinal round at the TopCoder Invitational Programming Tournament.

Trayton Otto, a Tech Computer Science major, competes in the semifinal round at the TopCoder Invitational Programming Tournament

Otto was one of 15 finalists in the competition that not only included students from other prestigious colleges in the country, but also professional computer programmers. Otto’s task in the final round was divided into three computer problems of increasing difficulty which he chose to solve using Java. The first asked Otto to calculate the least number of moves that could be taken to move a red checker piece from one side of a checkerboard to the other, while still moving past the black pieces. The second program enabled a user to input a single arbitrary string into the interface and receive as an output, a series of multiple strings. The final, as well as the most difficult, required the competitor to design a program that would perform the basic mathematics functions on inputs containing very large numerical values.

Although Trayton Otto was not the winner of the $100,000 grand prize, he still won $3,000 for making it to the semifinalist level. John McAlister from Stanford University won the tournament. “It was definitely a good group who came to the contest. A lot of the programming skill came from their innate ability,” said McAlister, whose computer program aimed to investigate some of the mathematical representations in residential telephone lines.

The starting point for Otto, McAlister, and every other programmer, is TopCoder’s website, www.topcoder.com, which is not only the hub to forums where programmers such as Otto discuss solutions to various problems, but also where anyone interested can take a look at the company’s mission statement and the rationale for its existence.

In addition, there are links directly on the website to documents concerning equal economic status compared to other professions in the United States. Long-term goals such as these were the impetus for the founding of the company. “Programmers are looked at as a community as a whole, where it is difficult to differentiate between one and the next…it doesn’t specify in terms of skills, as do the various professions in the field. This is exactly what I did way back as a freshman: I emailed the director of the research center in which I was interested. And even though he’s one of the busiest administrators on campus, he took the time to talk with me within the next couple of weeks. I came with my resume and convinced him that I would be an addition to the center. It was cake.

So don’t be scared of professors. The reason the Institute exists is to serve students in their pursuit of education. They have a lot to gain from recruiting students—it’s how they get their research done. And Georgia Tech is one of the best-funded schools in the nation. Hundreds of millions of dollars are procured annually from government and private sources. And President Coughlin himself has indicated a desire to increase research among undergraduates. In my case, I was fortunate enough to receive monetary recompense. Honestly, you probably shouldn’t expect to get paid for your work; you get invaluable experience from it anyway. But, heck, it sure is a nice perk.

Anyway, so now you’ve been accepted to the group, right? Of course, now you want to make sure you’re a productive member and that you get good experience. In many fields, this is also a great time to get your self-published, especially if you’re interested in pursuing graduate studies. Hopefully the professor can help you arrange this. You can hopefully build up to eventually being able to submit to one of the better-reputed journals in your field. But that can take a lot of work and experience. This gives me the perfect time to shamelessly plug a new student publication here at Tech that will publish student research articles: The "Journal of Student Research and Technology." (jsrt@gatech.edu; cyberbuzz.gatech.edu/jsrt) Doing research is good. It will help establish professional contacts that could prove extremely valuable in the future. And, oh yeah, you get to be involved with some really amazing advancement of knowledge.
Tech Up Close

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email: focus@technique.gatech.edu

Last week’s Tech Up Close:
Student Center Stinger stop

Last week’s Winner: Michael Castille