

REMARKS BY GEORGIA TECH PRESIDENT G. WAYNE CLOUGH
Luncheon for the Arts, Ferst Center, January 6, 2003

It is a great pleasure to welcome this impressive group of Atlanta arts leaders to Georgia Tech and to our Ferst Center for the Arts.

When people hear the words “Georgia Tech” and “the arts” in the same sentence, they invariably respond with either astonishment or skepticism. After all, Georgia Tech is known for engineering, and isn’t that about as far away from the arts as it’s possible to get?

Actually, our provost Jean-Lou Chameau would argue that engineering is an art. Engineering requires fresh ideas, creativity, mental focus, and discipline, all of which are also true of the arts. It also demands mathematical precision, but then so does music. And, as you will see in a few minutes, both engineering and the arts involve carefully orchestrated teamwork. So, it makes sense for the arts to have a vital and lively presence here on our campus.

Research has documented a close connection between mathematical and musical skills, and more than half of our students are musicians. They are the ones who, when their math teacher introduced fractions, said, “Oh, we already understand all about half-notes and quarter-notes and eighth-notes.” So it should not surprise you to learn that Georgia Tech offers a minor in music and has a wide variety of instrumental and vocal programs for students. At any given time, more than 700 Georgia Tech students are studying, singing, and playing in music programs here on campus.

We are also keenly interested in literature. We have a School of Literature, Communication and Culture, and Georgia Tech might well be the only university in the United States that has not just one but two endowed chairs in poetry – at least we do not know of any others.

Thomas Lux, author of nine published volumes of poetry, holds the Bourne Chair in Poetry. Last October, he organized the largest and most prestigious poetry reading Atlanta had ever seen. The 1,200 tickets went like hot-cakes, and we had a sell-out crowd here in the Ferst Center theater for Lux and three other prominent American poets, including Billy Collins, who is America’s poet laureate and best-selling poet, and who will come to Georgia Tech in 2004 to hold the McEver Visiting Chair in Writing – our other endowed chair.

The poetry reading also featured Rita Dove, who is a former national poet laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner, and Stephen Dobyns, who has written eight volumes of poetry and 18 novels, and will hold the McEver Chair during 2003. It was a literary gathering like Atlanta had never seen. And we hope to arrange and host more of them.

Then there is DramaTech, our student theatre, which was started in 1947 and is the oldest continuously operating theater in the City of Atlanta. And when it comes to the visual arts, we think big – much of Atlanta’s skyline and many of our distinctive architectural structures are the work of graduates from Georgia Tech’s College of Architecture.

We are also trying to engage the community more fully in our artistic endeavors. Our many student performances are open to the public, and the Ferst Center is in its 11th season of offering a top-notch array of performances in classical music, opera, jazz, dance, and comedy. The Ferst Center also offers a series of daytime artistic performances for school groups; provides special arts activities for the three Atlanta schools that Georgia Tech has adopted; and offers a popular drama summer camp.

This is certainly not an exhaustive account of arts activities at Georgia Tech – just enough to let you know two things: First, that there is more to the arts at Georgia Tech than you might think, and we intend to continue growing and developing our arts programs. And second, that we welcome opportunities to work together with Atlanta's other arts organizations.

I am going to close with a question that I hope you will keep in the back of your minds as Bill and Becky Rouse make their presentation: How can Georgia Tech contribute to the process of creating a more cohesive arts community in Atlanta and developing the leadership that will take us to the next level? After the Rouse duo makes their presentation, we are going to open the floor for discussion, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas at that time.

Thank you for joining us today. We value the contributions that each of your organizations makes to Atlanta's cultural life. We hope that this luncheon will help to inaugurate a new level of conversation and cooperation for Atlanta's arts community, and we want Georgia Tech to be a participant and partner in that effort.