

Notes from the President

Georgia Tech Honors Our Veterans

11/30/2015

If you were on campus on Veterans Day, you probably noticed the whistle blowing 11 times at 11:11 a.m. They commemorate the end of World War I, whose hostilities between the Allied nations and Germany formally ended on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918. The whistle blasts marked the beginning of the Veterans Day celebration at the Campanile. My remarks are included below.

We welcome everyone who has come together today to honor our American military veterans — men and women who have played a vital role in our country's history, and who are a treasured part of Georgia Tech as students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

You've probably seen them on campus, or maybe in one of your classes. We have 190 veterans enrolled this fall and another 300 or so on faculty and staff. In addition, we have 140 veterans enrolled in our Online Masters of Computer Science program.

And I'm proud to report that we have two recipients of the U.S. Army War College Senior Service Fellowships on campus with us. Colonel Mike Quinn and Colonel Lonnie Carlson are studying at our Sam Nunn School of International Affairs for this academic year. They will audit classes and pursue independent research to address issues critical to the Army and Department of Defense.

Georgia Tech is also the proud alma mater of two of America's highest-ranking military officers. General Philip Breedlove, who spoke at our Spring Commencement, is NATO's Supreme Allied Commander. He's a 1977 CEE graduate. Admiral Sandy Winnefeld retired last July from his position as the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the nation's second highest-ranking military officer. He graduated in 1978 with an Aerospace Engineering degree and has returned as a Distinguished Professor in our Sam Nunn School of International Affairs.

Tomorrow night at the football game against Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech Athletics will echo our appreciation by recognizing our student veterans. Despite our veterans' relatively small number on campus, their contributions to our country have been huge. They have often been America's first responders when there is danger around the world. They can face existential threats, ranging from hostile fire to deadly diseases.

Our veterans contribute to our campus diversity in many ways. With an average age of 27 for our veteran undergraduates and 34 for veteran graduate students, they are typically a bit older than our traditional students. Their rich background of life and work experiences enhances not only their education, but also can enrich the educational experience of their fellow students.

At Georgia Tech, we're committed to our veterans and making sure that their on-campus needs are met. In October our Veterans Resource Center conducted a needs-assessment survey of Georgia Tech's student veterans. A significant finding from the survey was that 85% of respondents felt like Tech was military-friendly. Additionally, 80% indicated an easy transition into the Tech community, and 74% felt a connection to Tech.

Those are pretty good indicators that we're doing some things right, but some respondents indicated having difficulty applying to Tech and unawareness of support and services available to them. Respondents also reported they are looking for more opportunities to meet and network with other student veterans, highlighting a need to improve assistance to student veterans in these areas. These are areas in which we can do better.

We reach out to veterans in a number of ways. Our College of Business And Computer Science is expanding outreach to military members and veterans with our Online Masters of Computer Science degree and our Evening and Executive MBA programs. Our new Veterans Pathway Program helps veterans who have completed active duty within the past five years to pursue non-engineering degrees.

We're also proud of our Veterans Education Training and Transition Program (VET2, also called Vet-Squared or Vet-Two). It's a four-week program offered by Georgia Tech at no cost to active-duty service members and veterans that ties professional education with an internship with veteran-friendly employers. This program was started two years ago when the veteran unemployment rate was at 13.9% for post-9/11 veterans in Georgia.

Today, the VET2 program has a 99% job-offer rate for service members completing the program and, because of the increased focus this program and similar initiatives across the state have brought to the challenges service members face during their transition, the unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans in Georgia has dropped below 7%.

The VET2 program is open to Active Duty, Reserve or National Guard personnel and is the first active duty internship-to-employment program in the country.

Other points of pride:

- Georgia Tech is among the nation's top recipients of Department of Defense research funds. In Fiscal 2015, GTRI had \$322 million of DOD research expenditures.
- We have an active Military Affinity Group.

Our cutting-edge research works on problems such as traumatic brain injury, regenerative medicine/tissue engineering for wounded service members/veterans, prosthetics and orthotics and countless innovations for virtually all parts of the military.

It's wonderful and fitting that we honor our veterans on this Veterans Day. But these courageous men and women represent us here and abroad every day with a deep sense of duty that binds them together and also inspires them to serve as a shield for all Americans. They are both warriors and peacekeepers. They carry this burden so that we may all pursue our shared values of liberty, justice, and self-determination. We owe them a debt that can never be fully repaid.

G. P. "Bud" Peterson
President, Georgia Tech