

Georgia Institute of Technology
2009 Presidents' Dinner Remarks
G.P. "Bud" Peterson, President
May 15, 2009

May 15, 2009—Good evening. It is a privilege for me to join Alumni Association Chair Bill Todd and Foundation Chair Herky Harris in welcoming you to this year's Presidents' Dinner.

It is truly an honor and a humbling experience for me, as an engineer and academic administrator, to assume the role as the eleventh President of the Georgia Institute of Technology. When I began exploring the possibility of moving to Georgia Tech, I did some background research. What I found was one of the finest institutions in the country—an institution that has made tremendous strides over the past 20 years, and one poised to continue enhancing its excellence and contributing to the quality of life around the world. My first two months on the job have only served to strengthen and confirm this early assessment.

Since arriving on April 1, Val and I have focused on trying to learn as much as possible about every aspect of this great university – trying to learn why Georgia Tech is one of the nation's top ten public universities. Our efforts have revealed a number of things:

First, we have an outstanding student body—the average SAT scores for freshmen admitted for the fall semester is 1397 and the average GPA is 3.95. The quality and quantity of these students continues to increase as has the diversity. This fall, we will admit the largest, best qualified, and most diverse freshmen class in the history of Georgia Tech. These are students who are incredibly engaged—engaged in their education, engaged in their communities here at Georgia Tech, and engaged in their lives and the lives of those around them.

Second, we have a truly outstanding faculty, one that is second in the nation in the number of National Science Foundation CAREER Awards. This is accompanied by a long list of other honors and accomplishments that is not only increasing in number, but also is becoming much more diverse. We have a growing number of humanities-oriented awards that reflects Tech's increasing breadth of academic offerings and an increasing number of liberal arts and management faculty who are winning awards generally given to scientists and engineers. I believe that this reflects a rapidly growing awareness of Georgia Tech's genuinely interdisciplinary culture.

And third, we have an incredibly devoted alumni that includes many of you sitting in the audience this evening. You represent a group of alumni whose support of your alma mater is among the strongest in the country. The support you have provided and continue to provide has been a significant factor in enabling Georgia Tech to achieve the greatness it enjoys today. To you, we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude. And I am particularly grateful to be able to thank you tonight and to have this opportunity, right at the beginning of my time as President, to express my deepest appreciation for all you do to do support Georgia Tech, its students, its faculty and its programs.

This is an exciting time to be joining Georgia Tech and there is much to celebrate. There are numerous visible signs of continued growth and progress, all across the campus.

Today, we are a top 5 engineering school and a top ten public university, that is the largest producer of engineers in the United States—and not just cookie-cutter engineers, who know the formulas, but a different breed of engineers who know what to do with the answers. Along with these engineers, we produce outstanding students in management, in the sciences, in public policy

and in a host of other fields. I have said before and truly believe that if the fundamental issues that face our nation today are going to be solved, they are going to be solved at places like Georgia Tech!

Our growing research enterprise exceeds a half-billion dollars—one of largest in nation, for universities that do not have a medical school. We have a broad international scope, with an international presence at strategic locations around the world.

And we have an incredible campus facility, much of which has been supported, not by the state, but rather by a dedicated and committed group of alumni. Since starting as President just seven weeks ago, I have participated in the ground breaking of the new Zelnak Basketball Practice Facility, dedicated the Marcus Nanotechnology Building, and we are seeing progress on the Clough Undergraduate Learning Commons. Many of you have helped to make these wonderful new facilities possible.

As we look ahead, it is clear that we face many challenges—sustaining excellence and continuing progress in a tough economic time when resources become harder to find. But I am confident that we can continue the upward trajectory Georgia Tech has enjoyed for the past 20 years—working together with faculty, staff, students, alumni, advisory boards, and friends of Georgia Tech we can lift this Institute to the next level.

To do this, we are preparing to launch a comprehensive strategic planning process that you will hear more about in the days ahead. Georgia Tech has long been considered among the leading public universities in the country, but our position in this elite group is not assured and cannot be taken for granted. Our place among the best universities is continually challenged and judged by how well we are able to meet the evolving needs of the world around us. Through an inclusive and comprehensive strategic planning process, will emerge the characteristics that will define us as a great institution over the next 25 years, and that process will allow us to better identify, develop and embody those characteristics.

But more on that later—tonight, I want to thank you both individually and collectively! You in the Leadership Circle make important contributions—You are the backbone of unrestricted giving, which is especially critical at these difficult economic times. Your support enables us to focus on top priorities; provides flexibility to seize unexpected opportunities, and allow us to deal with unexpected circumstances. You have not only given significant gifts, but most of you are faithful, long-time donors who have stepped up to the plate year after year, serving on advisory boards, and connecting with Georgia Tech in a host of ways.

It is a privilege to be serving this Institute you so clearly love and I am grateful for this opportunity to thank you for the important role you play and I am looking forward to getting to know all of you as we move forward together in our quest to make Georgia Tech even greater.

Thank you.