

# Notes from the President

## *Innovation is the Future*

02/06/2012

I recently had the privilege of speaking at [Texas A&M University at Qatar](#) as part of their Distinguished Lecture Series. As many of you know I taught and served in leadership at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas for 19 years, and it was especially meaningful to represent Georgia Tech at Texas A&M's Qatar campus. While at Texas A&M, I never dreamed that they would one day have a campus in Qatar. It is yet one more reaffirmation of the globalization of education, and of the need to produce more students who are prepared to develop solutions in science, technology, engineering, math, and related fields with a global perspective. While Georgia Tech is not one of the American universities with a presence in Education City, Qatar, we do have [several international education and research platforms](#), including activities in Lorraine, Singapore, Panama, Costa Rica and Ireland. Dual degree programs have been established with universities in Mexico, China, Korea, Singapore, Italy, Germany, Great Britain, and South Africa.

The title of my presentation in Qatar was [“Creating an Environment that Fosters Innovation,”](#) and I selected this for two reasons. First, I believe that the solution to many of our most pressing problems lies in innovation. And second, I chose it because innovation and economic development have been a vital part of Georgia Tech's culture since its founding 126 years ago. The Institute was created to solve industry problems. You could say innovation has been one of the foundations upon which Georgia Tech was built.

In my presentation, I talked about some of the things we are doing in both research and education to foster innovation. Our overall approach to research is “use inspired,” that is we seek to understand what it would take to solve a problem in the real world and then use that to guide us in our approach to our more fundamental research. Our commitment to fostering an environment of innovation is woven throughout our [25-year Strategic Plan](#). In fact, one of our five main goals is to “Ensure that Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Public Service are Fundamental Characteristics of our Graduates.”

We are implementing a number of things to accomplish this goal, including making it easier for faculty, staff, students, and the community to move their innovations to the marketplace. Our programs range from the [Advanced Technology Development Center \(ATDC\)](#), which has been helping technology entrepreneurs in Georgia launch and build successful companies for 22 years, to [Flashpoint](#), a new “startup accelerator” launched just this past year. In addition, students are encouraged to develop inventions through our annual [InVenture Prize](#) competition, and learn to work as an interdisciplinary team to overcome the hurdles of commercializing research through our [TI:GER program \(Technological Innovation: Generating Economic Results\)](#).

We are also working to foster innovation through new teaching methods and programs, such as the X-Degree, which provides enormous flexibility in new emerging fields, problem-driven learning, and vertically integrated projects. Our new [Clough Undergraduate Learning Commons](#), with its flexible and open design, is linked directly to the library for boundless resources in a common enterprise, and has proven to be a tremendous resource and platform for collaborative learning and problem solving.

At Georgia Tech, we are committed to preparing students to become innovators and leaders, as well as helping faculty and staff to commercialize their ideas more quickly.

We have a pretty successful track record, and we're building on that success. Many people are surprised to learn that more than 40 percent of Georgia Tech inventors are either graduate or undergraduate students, and 80 percent of the invention disclosures this past year listed at least one student as a co-inventor. Tech students are designing new devices for heart surgery and pneumonia diagnosis. They are traveling across the world to design and install systems to provide clean water in rural villages. They are being inspired and mentored by faculty and staff who are creating innovations that are helping to solve some of societies grand challenges and fueling the economy, globally, nationally, and right here in Georgia.

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