

Notes from the President

Georgia Institute of Technology

G.P. “Bud” Peterson, President

Leaders talk about research and future opportunities as part of “Conversations” series

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Georgia Tech’s research priorities and funding opportunities were discussed at the town hall event March 16 in the Ferst Center. The event was part of the Conversations with Senior Leadership series being held this spring, open to all faculty, staff, and students.

Sharing brief comments were G.P. “Bud” Peterson, president, Steve Cross, EVP for Research, and Robert Knotts, director of Federal Relations working out of the Washington, D.C., office. Also participating in discussions and serving as a resource was Michael Ledford, partner and VP for Client Management at Lewis-Burke Associates in Washington, D.C.

Peterson outlined Georgia Tech’s three research objectives: to create transformative opportunities, develop collaborative partnerships, and maximize economic and societal impact by acceleration to market. He discussed Georgia Tech’s leadership role in Tech Square, including the creation of the many corporate innovation centers and startups, as an example of impacting acceleration to market. “Several members of the Metro Chamber were just in Austin for South by Southwest. They reported that there was a lot of talk about what we’re doing here in Atlanta,” he said.

Steve Cross focused on Georgia Tech’s leadership, momentum, and diversity in research. Of the Institute’s \$786 million in research expenditures, he noted that in the past year Georgia Tech industry research funding topped \$100 million for the first time. He said that his office will continue to focus on efforts to facilitate the win rate for large awards. He talked about the importance of diversifying support and his commitment to help develop greater awareness of foundation opportunities that are a good match for Georgia Tech competencies.

Cross talked about guiding principles in times of change. “As we navigate the new administration and what it might mean for our research at Georgia Tech, I say this: Our guiding principles remain unchanged. Research at Georgia Tech is led by faculty, powered by ideas, and supported by professionals.”

He highlighted Georgia Tech's research in cell-based manufacturing, bringing together manufacturing, biomedical engineering, materials science, and biologists as a transformative opportunity. It is designed to scale up the production of therapeutic cells, with the potential to dramatically improve healthcare globally. Cell Manufacturing Therapies is one of two Engineering Research Center proposals for which Georgia Tech is a national finalist.

Robert Knotts gave a brief overview of what his office does in Washington, D.C., to look out for Georgia Tech's interests. He spoke about the importance of having faculty and staff engaged in national leadership, and Georgia Tech's involvement in national organizations such as the Association of American Universities (AAU) and the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU).

Knotts addressed the fact that the preliminary "skinny budget" had just been released that morning by the Trump administration, including dramatic proposed cuts. He gave a brief overview of the budgeting process. A more detailed budget request is expected to be released in May, followed by congressional appropriations committees holding budget hearings in the weeks and months to come. Numerous changes are anticipated.

Knotts recommended that people who rely on federal funding think about diversifying, including different agencies and smart partnerships with colleagues in other disciplines at Georgia Tech, and at other universities.

During the question-and-answer period, Cross talked about the need to diversify our funding. Now, 75 percent is from the federal government, and 10 percent is philanthropy. He referred to international partnerships, including Institut Lafayette at Georgia Tech-Lorraine and our Shenzhen, China campus, as well as strategic partnerships with industry in the U.S., our creation of the Industry Leadership Council, and changes to intellectual property requirements to attract more industry collaboration.

The conversation included immigration, Georgia Tech's role in health analytics, and cybersecurity.

Michael Ledford was asked to name what he felt some of the priorities would be for the current administration. He listed nuclear, including defense and power applications, fundamental research that may not yet be as attractive to industry, "moonshot" opportunities including space exploration, larger disease areas such as cancer and neuroscience, and manufacturing as it pertains to the balance of trade.

"When I look at Georgia Tech, I feel pretty good," said Peterson. "We have leadership in research in numerous areas. We are diversified, and have leadership roles in public policy. When we were designing our Strategic Plan, we introduced the question, 'What does Georgia Tech think?' as an aspirational goal. We are bringing that to life. We are engaged in what is happening nationally, serving in leadership roles in professional organizations, on committees and task forces, and testifying before Congress. We are well represented across disciplines, and people are looking to Georgia Tech for leadership in a number of areas."