

REMARKS BY GEORGIA TECH PRESIDENT G. WAYNE CLOUGH
Freshman Convocation, August 18, 2003

I'm pleased to add my voice to the chorus that is welcoming you to Georgia Tech, and to tell you a little about the history and future of this great Institute.

I once sat where you are sitting today, so I have a working knowledge of at least some of my topic. I grew up in rural South Georgia and was among the first in my family to receive a college degree, so when I came here as a student, my aspirations were to just get that B.S. degree. But Tech helped me understand there was more to life, and I later attended U.C. Berkeley to obtain my Ph.D.

Georgia Tech launched me on a fulfilling career in engineering, teaching, and research that ultimately led to my return to this campus in 1994 as president. I certainly never dreamed that would happen when I was here as a student, and I'm sure most of the faculty who taught me did not anticipate seeing me again, much less as president. But that is the way life works if you keep at it. Good things happen if you work hard and use what Tech teaches you.

The history of this great university is a lot of territory to cover in ten minutes, to say nothing of its future, so I'm going to shorten it to three snapshots. The first one comes from Georgia Tech's earliest days.

Tech was created by state law in 1885, and the state provided \$65,000 to build the campus and pay for the first year of operation. Undeterred by those slim rations, the school opened on October 5, 1888 with 129 students, all of them mechanical engineering majors. The campus had two buildings – the Academic Building, which we now call the Tech Tower and which is still the heart of campus today – and a shop building. Students lived in boarding houses around town.

The students were all white males. They wore suits and ties to class, then changed clothes and helped to support the school while learning hands-on skills by working in wood and metal shops that made parts for Atlanta industries.

More than a century has gone by since those days, but some things haven't changed much: In 1893 Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia played their first football game in Athens. Tech won by a score of 28-6. UGA complained that the officiating wasn't fair and threw rocks at the Tech team as they ran to board the train back to Atlanta.

Football gave Georgia Tech our first national exposure. We were barely 20 years old when our first paid coach, John Heisman, led the team to national prominence and later had the Heisman Trophy named for him. About the same time, in 1912, Tech became the fourth university in the world to begin a co-op program. And today we have the largest voluntary co-op program in the nation.

Now, for the second snapshot: Fast-forward about a half a century to 1959, which is the year I matriculated at Georgia Tech as a freshman. By this time Tech had evolved into a noteworthy regional university in the South. We had graduated our very first Ph.D. about a decade earlier and were doing over a million dollars of sponsored research a year. We had 5,400 students, still mostly engineering majors, which put us first in the South and fourth in the nation in engineering enrollment.

Unfortunately, our campus capacity was for only half that many students, so classes met from early morning until late at night, and even on Saturday. I can testify that you haven't lived until you've had a calculus class at 8:00 on Saturday morning. You will find that the class schedule has improved somewhat since then.

The fifties and sixties brought significant changes to the culture of Georgia Tech. In the fall of 1952, Marilyn Monroe appeared on the cover of *Look* magazine, wearing a Georgia Tech sweater to celebrate the admission of the first two women students. And last year we celebrated the 50th anniversary of women at Tech. We also recently celebrated the 40th anniversary of another step toward diversity. In 1961, Georgia Tech became the first university in the Deep South to integrate voluntarily.

Freshman convocation was already a tradition when I came to Georgia Tech as a student, and I remember only one thing about it. We were told to look at the person on our left, then at the person on our right. By the time graduation rolled around, we were told, only one of the three of us would be left.

In those days students did not need strong qualifications to get into Tech, but the curriculum was very demanding. As a result, many students were overwhelmed by the difficulty of their courses. Today, the academics are still as tough as ever, but the admissions process is much more rigorous. You are the brightest class of freshmen we have ever admitted to Georgia Tech, and I hope and expect to hand every single one of you a Georgia Tech diploma.

Which brings me to the third snapshot: Georgia Tech today. We have grown from a good regional school into one of the top ten public universities in the United States.

Our research expenditures are now about \$375 million a year, which puts us among the top 30 research universities in the nation. We are a world leader in emerging interdisciplinary fields like biotechnology, nanotechnology, human-computer interaction, and sustainable technology. Together with MIT, we lead the nation in national research centers of excellence. Our influence is growing in Washington D.C. as well as abroad through our international campuses and partnerships.

Our enrollment today is about 16,500 students. We have gone from two women to more than 5,000, and from three minority students to nearly 6,000. And we are a national leader in graduating both women and minorities in engineering.

But you won't find all of these students here in Atlanta. We have four campuses on three continents, including Georgia Tech Savannah down on the coast, Georgia Tech Lorraine in France, and Georgia Tech Asia-Pacific in Singapore. All of these campuses award degrees to students who never set foot on the Atlanta campus.

We are still known for engineering and it's our biggest major, but we have a growing number of other great programs in a wide variety of fields. There are approximately 20 endowed chairs in poetry in the entire country, for example, and two of the 20 are here at Georgia Tech.

But the benchmark that is probably most pertinent for you is that we among the very few research universities that have won the Hesburgh Award, which is the nation's top prize for innovation in teaching and learning. You, our students, are at the core of our mission and the heart of our endeavors. Our goal is to give you the best of both worlds – a level of attention to the undergraduate experience that characterizes a liberal arts college combined with an opportunity to participate in the dynamic energy of a major research enterprise.

We have strengthened the student services that are available to help you succeed in our demanding curriculum, from better-trained teaching assistants who will advise your small groups and lab groups, to mid-semester progress reports and a response plan to help those who are falling behind. And I will tell you honestly that as a freshman I struggled because I did not know how to study. Only after I sought help did my student experience turn around.

We also hope that at least half of you will take advantage of the many opportunities to work with faculty in their research labs, either for pay or for academic credit, and to study abroad, either at one of our own campuses or in one of our 56 study abroad and exchange programs.

We are a leader in designing innovative new facilities for our students and faculty, and a number of them are opening just as you arrive on campus. They include Technology Square, which extends our campus across the expressway into the lively Midtown neighborhood; the Ford Environmental Science and Technology Building, which is our largest academic building; the Whitaker Building, new home of our biomedical engineering department; the historic John S. Coon Building, which has been completely renovated to house the School of Psychology; the Campus Recreation Center, which incorporates the swimming pool from the 1996 Olympics and doubles the size of our student recreation facilities, and the Whitehead Building, which houses the comprehensive Stamps Student Health Services.

During the coming year, you will also see the completion of the Student Center Commons and the beginning of the Klaus Advanced Computing Technology Building. We are awaiting the state portion of the funding for a new Undergraduate Learning Center, which should be underway in a few years – hopefully while you are still here.

These new and upcoming facilities point to Georgia Tech's future. It's fun to talk about Georgia Tech's past and we're proud of where we are today, but our most exciting days are yet to come. We are a university on the move, and our goal is to become the defining technological research university of the 21st century.

You have chosen a university with a rich and wonderful history, and you have become a Georgia Tech Yellow Jacket at one of the most exciting times in all of that history. So plunge in, get involved, and make the most of the next four years. If you do, I guarantee you'll have the time of your life, and your life will never be the same.