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Music Department fosters sense of community, increasing retention in the bargain

Sean Selman
Institute Communications
and Public Affairs

As Georgia Tech moves into the new century, a major goal for its faculty and staff is to create a campus environment where diversity is welcomed and valued. This increased emphasis on diversity is not intended to be an end, but a dynamic foundation for innovation and growth.

"In a global environment that thrives on innovation, diversity is a competitive advantage," President Wayne Clough said in his State of the Institute Address for 2000. "It provides a broader, richer, more fertile environment for creative thinking and problem solving."

Few programs on campus reflect these sentiments better than the Music Department in the College of Architecture, which brings together students of diverse ethnic groups and academic



From left, Kurt Fausset, Richard Bowen, Melody Liu, Kriangsiri Malasri and Elizabeth Dawson comprise the 'U.N. Quintet,' one of several chamber ensembles at Tech.

disciplines. In that vein, one would be hard pressed to find a group of students that represents the positive effects of diversity in action better than the Georgia Tech String Quintet.

Formed this past year by a group of enterprising second-year students, the quintet boasts five talented musicians from four ethnic groups. While they come from different backgrounds, the students

are united in their passion for music and in their common ties to Georgia Tech.

"We're pretty well represented racially and by gender, and we're well represented by majors and schools," said Melody Liu, a Chinese violinist with the quintet who studies international affairs. Other members of the quintet include Kriangsiri "Tippy" Malasri, an Indonesian violinist who studies aerospace engineering; Elizabeth Dawson, a Caucasian violinist in management; Richard Bowen, an African-American cellist studying chemical engineering; and Kurt Fausset, a Caucasian student in architecture who plays the string bass.

They jokingly refer to themselves as "The U.N. Quintet."

"Kurt had the idea for the quintet," Liu said. "He usually organizes the rehearsals, while I'm the

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Tech signs Barnes and Noble to manage campus bookstore

Michael Hagearty
Institute Communications and Public Affairs

With a simple stroke of the pen, future management of the Georgia Tech Bookstore quietly shifted this month. Taking up that mantle of responsibility will be a private company whose principal challenge lies in helping to realize the vision for the planned Fifth Street Project, recently renamed Technology Square.

As of July 1, the Bookstore will be under the guiding hand of Barnes and Noble College Bookstores, a division of the retailing giant that currently operates on some 400 university campuses in 44 states.

While the decision to privatize the Bookstore

is multifaceted, Senior Vice President of Administration and Finance Robert Thompson indicated that it is part and parcel of the strategic plan outlined by the administration.

The current bookstore, he said, doesn't support the overall strategic vision in accommodating both the direct educational as well as community outreach initiatives that will enhance Tech's reputation as a technological research university.

"Our bookstore needs to be a resource for that clientele," he said.

Rosalind Meyers, associate vice president of Auxiliary Services, explained what drove the Institute to look for outside assistance. The goal, she said, is to offer more than a traditional college bookstore.

"We were looking at creating a bookstore that would be three things: a college bookstore; a bookstore superstore for the Midtown community — books, CDs and a café; and a bookstore that would be a reference resource for our entire technical community." In order to accomplish that, she said "we felt we needed professional knowledge, resources and expertise we didn't possess."

When they take over in four months, Barnes and Noble will be responsible for the complete management of the store and its employees. Meyers anticipates that patrons will notice little in the way of operational changes, but did note a shift in policy regarding the computer store.

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General Faculty spring meeting will be Feb. 27 in the Student Center Ballroom

General Faculty and General Faculty Assembly will meet in the Student Center Ballroom on February 27 at 3 p.m. The major item of discussion will be a presentation on "Distance Learning" by Joe Boland, director of the Center for Distance Learning, followed by discussions of matters raised by various standing committees, including a first reading of changes to the statutes and bylaws in respect to election matters. A full agenda can be found at http://www.facultysenate.gatech.edu/generalfaculty_00-01.html. For more information, contact Edward Thomas, secretary of the faculty, at edward.thomas@physics.gatech.edu or 894-5249.

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liaison between the people who want to hire us and our orchestra director. But we all work together.”

Originally, Fausset had one piece of music written by Anton Dvorak that he wanted to play with a string quintet. He approached Liu, a fellow musician in the Georgia Tech Orchestra, about possibly forming a group to play the piece for fun. Liu recommended Malasri and Dawson for the quintet, while Fausset already knew Bowen from All-State performances in Florida.

“We all got together just to play around with this song — not really intending to do anything spectacular with it — but we ended up staying together all this time, playing one performance and a couple of gigs in the meantime,” Liu said.

They also became friends in the bargain.

“The ‘U.N. Quintet’ is very special and it epitomizes not only the strength of the interest Tech students have in music and the arts, but also how important both are in all of our lives,” College of Architecture Dean Thomas Galloway said. “We are extremely proud of Melody, Toppy, Elizabeth, Richard and Kurt, as well as the many other students engaged in the ensemble opportunities that our Music Department advances each year.”

Ron Mendola is the quintet’s faculty adviser as well as director of Jazz and Orchestra Programs in the Music Department. He said all five members of the quintet are part of the larger, 82-piece Georgia Tech Orchestra.

“These kids are united by their pronounced gifts — any one of them could have been accepted as music majors at the best schools in the country — and by their love of the baroque, classical and romantic masterworks,” Mendola said. “Just as Yo Yo Ma and Midori both remarked upon their own widely ranging tastes in music during recent master classes at Georgia Tech, these students are into a lot of other types of music as well, from jazz to club music and other alternative styles.”

The string quintet is one of a number of ensembles that have formed at Georgia Tech due to a virtual explosion of interest in chamber music among students, Mendola said.

“We also have a string quartet, a saxophone quartet, two brass quintets, a clarinet quartet, a Musical Instrument

Digital Interface, or MIDI, ensemble, an indoor percussion ensemble and a flute choir,” he said. “All that is in addition to large ensembles like the Concert Band, the Symphonic Band, two Jazz Ensembles, the Orchestra, the Chorale, the Chamber Choir and the Men’s Glee Club.”

Striking a chord

As the music program at Tech grows — it currently serves more than 900 students each semester — student diversity grows as well, reflecting the increased breadth of ensemble and course offerings. Mendola said expanding interest in music at Tech also boosts the Institute’s retention efforts. A study released in fall 2000 shows that Tech’s music students enjoy a much higher rate of graduation and retention.

“Remarkably, of all the campus activities measured, only musical participation seems to have this effect or link to retaining students at Tech,” Mendola said.

“IT’S FUNNY HOW DIVERSE WE ARE, AND WE SOMETIMES ACKNOWLEDGE AND TALK ABOUT IT, BUT IT DOESN’T HAVE ANY INFLUENCE ON US OTHERWISE. WE’RE VERY CONNECTED THROUGH THE MUSIC, AND THAT’S ALL WE REALLY NEED.”
—MELODY LIU

According to the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, data indicate that students who take at least one music course here are more likely to remain in college than those who do not study music. Officials examined data on all first-time, full-time freshmen who began their studies in the fall of 1995. The preliminary, six-year retention rate for this group of students is 70 percent. Statistics indicate that 88 percent of the students who had taken at least one music course either graduated or were still enrolled by the fall 2000 semester. By comparison, 64 percent of the students who did not take a music course were retained during the same period.

“Retention has been a major issue at Georgia Tech for many years, and I was curious as to the effect music has on retention. I was frankly surprised by the results of this study,” Galloway said. “I think one of the underlying understandings about retention is that the more connected a student is, the more engaged that person is in student life and academic life. We hope that Tech will increase its support of the Music

Department and enlarge its offerings.”

Sandra Bramblett, director of Institutional Research and Planning at Georgia Tech, said the numbers in the study indicate a significantly strong association between having taken at least one music course and student-retention rates. The data reflect students throughout the Institute.

“This is but one piece of the retention puzzle. We have several areas where we started tracking trends,” Bramblett said. “But this is a trend that bears more study.”

“The first time we saw these numbers we were tremendously excited,” Music Director James “Bucky” Johnson said. “It’s so hard to put numbers on music. When you can document something that you suspect, and it works out to be as dramatic as this, it makes you proud and it makes you excited.”

Mendola said that, aside from the benefits of increased student retention, shared musical experiences foster another powerful effect — a unique sense of community and accomplishment that erases ethnic and racial barriers.

“In the rehearsal, practice and performance of great music, students become more open to each other, more confident, more mature and more creative as individuals, all through a common activity that is as disciplined as it is rewarding, and as passionate as it is demanding,” he said.

The Music Department got another boost recently when the program earned \$20,000 for a Technology Fee Proposal Mendola submitted this past year. The grant will give the string quintet and quartet access to a variety of new instruments, including two MIDI violins and a MIDI viola, cello and bass.

“This will give us an entree into the latest electric violin and MIDI controller/synthesizer combinations,” Mendola said. “In essence, it means these five instruments can be made to sound like almost any synthesized or sampled sound, whether it is instrumental, vocal or effect related. The students are pretty excited about the possibilities.”

Institute Initiatives 2001

Part of an ongoing series that looks at the progress of the major policy initiatives outlined in President Clough’s recent State of the Institute address. For more information on the series, refer to <http://www.gatech.edu/21stCentury/>.



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“Let us be clear: it was no one’s brilliant thesis that tore down the walls of segregation. Nobody wrote a paper, and Congress said ‘Oh this is great, let’s vote...’ It was only mass movement and tremendous pain and sacrifice...” Engaging the audience with a passionate delivery, charisma, and even a little humor, Al Sharpton urged students to be agents for change in his Feb. 15 keynote address for this year’s Black History Month Celebration. Speaking in front of a packed house in Tennenbaum auditorium, he called on everyone, white and black, to consider not only the struggles of the past, but also their obligation to future generations.

“Have a knowledge of your history, but let that inspire you to make history,” he said. “You may not choose to fight my way, but choose some way. Come up with a better way.”



Photo by Sanley Leary

Employee marks 50 years of service for Tech

Barbara Wilson
Auxiliary Services

Ruthie Beck has seen many changes over her 50 years in Dining Services at Georgia Tech. From the first women entrants, to integration, the Vietnam War, the Olympics and other Tech and Atlanta milestones, she has been an eyewitness to much of this campus' history. Yet some things, she says, have remained the same over this half century.

"Everybody I have come into contact with has always treated me nice," Ms. Beck said. "I have always liked my job."

Born in Wadley, Ala., she ventured westward for work before eventually settling in Atlanta. She found a job and a new life with her husband. It was then she became employed with Georgia Tech. The date was March 26, 1951.

In her early years, "Ms. Ruthie," as she has come to be known, worked at Brittain Dining Hall at a time when table service for the students was provided. That was followed by another 18 years at Ferst Place. Most recently, one can find her working in the Student Center Food Court, making sandwiches daily from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m.

Those who know her wonder about the secret of her success and her longevity — something she is not quick to give out.

"My secret is working around young people," she confessed. "You look young, you act young, and you feel young when you work around young people."

Her positive demeanor has captured the hearts of many in her days at Tech, and she has

twice been named Employee of the Month for Auxiliary Services. On February 23, she was recognized once more as February's honoree, with President Wayne Clough on hand to acknowledge her dedication.

"Ms. Ruthie's smiles have been warming students' hearts for 50 years," said Rosalind Meyers, associate vice president of Auxiliary Services.

Marriott's Director of Dining Services at Georgia Tech, Vern Johnson, holds Ms. Ruthie in highest esteem.

"In this day and age of mergers and uncertainties, it is comforting and inspiring to have such a wonderful and loyal friend and co-worker," he said. Johnson is the 11th director during Beck's years of service.

Her immediate supervisor, Joe Davenport, has spent many hours talking with this "amazing" woman.

"When she first started working here, she came in at 7 a.m. and racked glasses," he said. "They would finish when the glasses were gone." At the time, she made \$10 per week.

But perhaps one of the greatest attributes of this woman is her dedication to her work. She has missed a mere five days of work in her 50 years of service to Tech.

"Ms. Ruthie just doesn't miss work, period," Davenport said. "With her, they didn't break the mold — she was the mold."

Her years of serving the thousands who have gone through her sandwich lines, and before, in the dining halls of Brittain, are something she is proud of and that she is able to continue.

"I am blessed. The Lord has blessed me. He's given me strength and I still feel good."



Photo by Barbara Wilson

After more than 90,000 hours at Tech, Ruthie Beck shows no signs of slowing down. "I have always liked my job," she said.

Preschooling scholarship for children of graduate students

The Office of the Dean of Students has announced that for the third year a unique opportunity is being made available to graduate students. The Preschool at Peachtree Road United Methodist Church has made available two scholarships for the church's early childhood program. These scholarships are for full tuition for four-year-old or five-year-old children of Georgia Tech graduate students.

Applications and information about the preschool may be picked up in suite 210 of the Student Services

Building, or requested by e-mailing Roz Barnett at roz.barnett@vpss.gatech.edu. Applications may be duplicated and shared with others. Additionally, applicants are required to take a tour of the facility and program, and may call to schedule a visit the week of March 19.

Applications are due by Monday, March 26. Send to the attention of Linda Young, director of The Preschool at the Peachtree Road United Methodist Church, 3180 Peachtree Road, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30363.

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In order to buy computer equipment under state contract, and due to the fact that the bookstore will be operated by a private concern, Meyers said, "Purchases that are made by departments for Georgia Tech use will be processed through the purchasing department without the bookstore as a sales agent." As of July 1, departments will be expected to work directly with the manufacturer's sales representatives for their equipment needs. Meyers added that a letter to the campus community detailing those changes will be drafted and sent in the coming weeks.

The bookstore will be just one of the support functions within Technology Square. But its significance to the overall project provides for added collaboration.

"One of the reasons we wanted to make sure our contract manager was on board is that we want them involved with the interior design of the new store," Meyers said. While

architecture firm Thompson, Ventulett, Stainback and Associates designs the building, Tech will work with architects from Barnes and Noble on developing the interior layout.

When completed, the new bookstore will occupy 50,000 square feet of Technology Square, a significant increase from the 30,000 square feet of space they enjoy in their current residence.

President Wayne Clough said, "The new bookstore will offer our students, faculty and staff a remarkable facility for improved service, hours of availability and ambience. In addition, it will serve as a vehicle to bring our Midtown neighbors to our campus and help build community."

Plans for utilizing the space the move will create are already a matter of discussion. At present, a committee of students, administrators and faculty appointed by Thompson are evaluating the options. Their recommendations will help give shape to the final decisions made in the coming months.

Faculty inducted into ODK

Known primarily as a student leadership and scholastic honorary society, the Alpha Eta Circle of Omicron Delta Kappa taps a few outstanding faculty/staff each year for membership.

Membership in ODK is considered the highest leadership honor available at Georgia Tech. In addition to 11 student inductees, **Dale Atkins**, senior research engineer, College of Engineering; **Edward W. Thomas**, professor, School of Physics; and **Brian Woodall**, associate professor,

School of International Affairs were initiated on February 23 at the Wesley Foundation and honored with a dinner immediately following the ceremony.

ODK, founded in 1914 at Washington and Lee University, was the first college honor society of national scope to give recognition and honor for meritorious leadership and service in extracurricular activities and to encourage development of general campus citizenship.