

Dr. Peterson

National Center for Women and Information Technology (NCWIT) Award for Aspirations in Computing Georgia Affiliate Celebration

Feb. 10, 2012, Academy of Medicine

Welcome to Georgia Tech. We're honored to have so many outstanding students here, along with your parents and other special guests. We also extend a warm Georgia Tech welcome to the corporations represented, and our guests from other universities. To all of you outstanding young women, congratulations. You're all winners. You have already demonstrated excellence in computing, leadership and your academic history. We're here to encourage you to press on and consider careers in the science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM and related fields.

In my work on the National Science Board and several other organizations, the conversation keeps going back to finding ways to encourage more young people to enter STEM fields. It is important for our nation's future to compete in a global economy. It is also a wise choice for career options. That's where the jobs are, in Georgia and throughout the nation.

A degree in a STEM field is a good investment. Last August, SmartMoney magazine ranked Georgia Tech number one in the nation based on the financial return graduates earn from their degree. (median pay for a recent GT grad was \$57,300; mid-career -- \$105,000.) Georgia Tech graduates are in demand. This past fall we had our annual career fair on campus. Over the course of the two-day career fair, almost 4,200 students had the opportunity to interact with 370 employers.

It is not just about the money or earning potential. You can apply your skills and leadership ability to help society. There is growing interest in socially relevant projects where students can make a difference in the lives of people around the world. For example, in our Computing for Good program students have worked on projects for everything from blood safety monitoring to shelter tracking for the homeless through United Way.

This year we're celebrating having full-time female students at Georgia Tech for 60 years. Today we are the number one producer of female engineers in the country. One third of our 21,000 students are women, and it's even higher for our freshman class. Women at Tech hold more than 40% of the leadership positions in our 400 student organizations. The president of the undergraduate student government association is a woman. You might want to check out our PSA on the Georgia Tech website. (Caity Jiminez)

Last summer I had the privilege of going to see the launch of the final shuttle in the space program, STS 135. They only had a crew of four because since it was the last U.S. launch to the international space station, they would have to rely on a Soviet ship as the rescue craft in the event of an emergency, and it doesn't carry as many passengers. That meant that the four people they chose had to have multiple skills and be the best of the best at NASA. Dr. Sandy Magnus, a Georgia Tech alumna, was on that crew. For you, like Dr. Magnus, the sky, or perhaps I should say the universe, is the limit. Congratulations, and we wish you the best.