

REMARKS BY GEORGIA TECH PRESIDENT G. WAYNE CLOUGH
Freshman Convocation, August 20, 2006

I'm pleased to add my voice to the chorus that is welcoming you to Georgia Tech. The start of a new academic year is always an exciting time for those of us who are privileged to serve this institution as well as for our students. Those of you here today arrive at an auspicious time. Georgia Tech's academic reputation has never been higher, our athletic programs are having some of their best years in our history, and more than anytime in our past our nation is looking to us for advice. And based on your qualifications, you are the best group of students to ever enter Georgia Tech, so we expect a lot of you.

Back when the earth was cooling, I sat where you are sitting today, as an entering freshman. I am sure you are more confident than I was, and I know you are better prepared than I was. My first mistake was to conclude that partying was a major at Georgia Tech and that studying came second. Unfortunately those things called tests pretty quickly brought a reality check, and fortunately I was able to make up for my early lack of focus with a late first-quarter comeback. Still, it took me about a year to figure out how to balance the fun you can have here with the demanding academics. I don't recommend this path to anybody – it is not good for your health and mental well being. It's better to do it the right way – get your academics going right while you keep your social activities in perspective.

I was among the first in my family to attend college, so when I came here as a student, my aspirations were to get a B.S. degree. It was only after a few years here at Tech – after I had finally sorted out what was important – that my faculty advisors began encouraging me to consider graduate school. With their help, I eventually got my M.S. here, and went to UC Berkeley to get my doctorate. My experiences here at Tech were an essential part in launching me on the fulfilling career in engineering, teaching, and research that ultimately led to my return to this campus 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. I can assure you that each of you has the potential to be president of Georgia Tech, but you'll have to wait a little while before you apply for the job.

Now, I am supposed to relate to you something about the history of this great university in the short time allotted to me today. This is a lot of territory to cover, 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. Those were pretty slim rations, but Tech was undeterred, and we opened on October 5, 1888 with 129 students, all of them majoring in mechanical engineering. The campus had two buildings – the Academic Building, which we now call the Tech Tower and which is still the heart of the campus today, and a shop building, which later burned down. 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 support the school while they learned hands-on skills 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. Today, you will find that we excel in a number of sports, from golf and volleyball to club sports like rowing and sky diving. The majority of our seventeen intercollegiate teams compete in post-season competitions year after year.

Now, for the second snapshot: Fast-forward about a half a century from 1888 to 1959, when I arrived at Georgia Tech as a freshman. By this time Atlanta was a noteworthy regional city of about 600,000 people and Tech was a noteworthy regional university of about 5,400 students. Unfortunately, our campus capacity was designed for less than 3,000 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.

Women had been admitted in 1952, and during my undergraduate days, each class level had about 30 women among its 1,300 to 1,400 students. While I was here in 1961, Georgia Tech became the first university in the Deep South to integrate voluntarily and enrolled three African American students. In contrast to what happened at many other universities in the region, the admission of African American students at Tech was accepted by the student body without any issues.

Which brings me to the third snapshot: Georgia Tech today. Georgia Tech has grown from a good regional school into one of the top ten public universities in the United States. We rank among the nation's top three dozen universities in the volume of research we conduct, and we are a world leader in emerging interdisciplinary fields like biotechnology, nanotechnology, human-computer interaction, and sustainable technology. Together with Berkeley and MIT, we lead the nation in the number of national research centers of excellence we have won. Our influence is growing in Washington D.C. as well as abroad through our international campuses and partnerships.

Our enrollment today is more than 17,000 students. We have gone from two women to almost 5,000 and from three minority students to more than 6,000. And we are a national leader in graduating both women and minorities in engineering and the sciences.

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 Singapore. And we offer nine degrees over the Internet. All of these campuses and programs award Georgia Tech degrees to students who may 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 great programs in a wide variety of other fields, from the sciences to architecture, from the liberal arts to business management. Did you know that two of the 20 endowed chairs in poetry in the United States are right here at Georgia Tech? Every spring we host one of the largest and most prestigious poetry readings in the country.

The distinction that is probably most pertinent for you is that we among the very few research universities to have won the Hesburgh Award, which is the nation's top prize for innovation in teaching and learning. You, our students, are 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 worked hard to provide you with the opportunities to broaden your experiences through co-op assignments, internships, study abroad, and undergraduate research. By the time our students graduate, a third of them have studied abroad, and more than 40 percent have participated in structured research. To advise you about your academic progress, we provide mid-semester progress reports and a response plan to help those who fall behind. And our drop date has been moved later in the semester to allow you to take into account what you learn from your midterm grades.

You are arriving just in time to take advantage of the \$1 billion in new facilities we have opened over the past few years. 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 Campus Recreation Center, which was completed just this summer and is one of the best facilities in the nation; the Whitehead Building, which houses the comprehensive Stamps Student Health Services, and the renovated Student Center.

But we are not done yet. We are just in the process of opening two more amazing new facilities – the Klaus Advanced Computing Building and the Molecular Science and Engineering Building. And you will find yourself detouring around the construction site for the Marcus Nanotechnology Building, which will be the largest cleanroom facility in the South and one of the largest in the world. We are also waiting for state funding for the Undergraduate Learning Center, which we hope will be underway in a few years.

These new facilities point to Georgia Tech's future and our ongoing quest for excellence, and 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 that history.

We want each and every one of you to succeed. Our nation needs your talent and the technological savvy you will learn here on our campus. 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.

Your Georgia Tech education will prepare you to succeed in many ways. Just consider the billion-dollar companies whose CEOs are Georgia Tech alumni – WalMart International, Coca-Cola Enterprises, Invesco, Gulfstream Aerospace, Dollar General, GE Commercial Finance, Shaw Industries, SEI Investments, and Earthlink. Beyond the world of business, we have alumni who have won the Nobel Prize, like Kerry Mullis; alumni who have served in the U.S. Senate, like Sam Nunn; alumni who have walked on the moon, like John Young; and even alumni who have become entertainers, like John Salley, Jeff Foxworthy, and Phil Gordon, who is not only a successful businessman but also a world poker champion who will advise you on TV about when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em.

So we're going to take a few minutes here to watch a video that features some of Georgia Tech's most interesting alumni.