REMARKS BY PRESIDENT G. WAYNE CLOUGH
CETL "Celebrating Teaching Day" Luncheon, March 18, 2004

It is an honor to be here with this group of people who care deeply about good teaching. There are several reasons why I look forward to this luncheon each year to celebrate teaching at Georgia Tech. First and foremost, it is an opportunity for me to personally thank you for your efforts and desire to improve your teaching skills.

Some of you are early in your careers, and this is a great opportunity to develop and hone your skills. Others of you are Hesburgh Fellows, who are recharging your batteries and renewing your techniques for this new age of technology. The third group we are honoring is the STEP Fellows, who are "test-driving" the teaching profession while at the same time enriching the science and math classrooms of Atlanta area high schools.

Whichever of these groups you are in, wherever you may be in your career, I want to commend you for your devotion to excellence in teaching, for your efforts to sharpen and focus your skills, and for the many ways you enrich the educational experience here at Georgia Tech.

The second reason I look forward to this annual event is because it provides an opportunity for me to express my appreciation to CETL for its hard work to improve the teaching and learning experience here at Georgia Tech. This is a very important and needed task.

By the time we finish our Ph.D. degrees, most of us have sat in the classrooms of about 90 different teachers. We have observed them in action for literally thousands of hours and had ample opportunity to ascertain the impact of their teaching, at least on our own learning. Yet, despite having had this incredible opportunity to observe and learn about the process of teaching and learning, we embark on our own teaching careers feeling like we know very little about it.

We are not sure how to get our students to prepare for class, or sometimes even to show up, or how to make our class environment more stimulating. And some days we are tempted to throw up our hands and conclude that students these days just are not as high quality as they used to be in other times or at other places.

All of us have memories of our own classroom experiences at the hands of those 90 or so teachers, both good and bad. American author Eudora Welty wrote about her vivid memories of the her rather militant grammar school principal, Miss Durling, who commanded order and obedience with a brass bell that seemed to grow directly out of her right arm. She rang it with a swing that involved her whole arm and shoulder, and it could be heard for block away in all directions. Ms. Durling obviously did not represent one of Eudora Welty's most positive educational memories.

But all of us can also find outstanding teachers in our own experience – teachers who influenced our thinking and changed our lives. The difference, I suspect, was not so much that they did not have a brass bell in their right hand, but that they cared about us and were engaged with us as

learners in their own right. As all of us know, real teachers do not teach subjects. They teach students.

Good teaching requires courage and self-confidence. It means taking risks, overcoming fears, and creating a partnership with your students in which both you and they share in the responsibilities of learning together. And that is the goal of CETL – to help you become a more critically reflective teacher, and a more creative and daring one.

Research universities tend not to be known for a commitment to teaching, and some people were surprised to see Georgia Tech win the Hesburgh Award for innovative teaching and learning a couple of years back. After all, our students are so bright; surely they are capable of muddling through on their own, or so the logic goes. In reality, bright students are just as much in need of excellent teaching as less capable students. And we do not serve our students well if we reduce the learning experience to the facts and formulae found in the textbooks.

Good teaching offers even the most intelligent student critical ballast:

- Guidance about the range of knowledge they should have and what is more or less important within that range.
- An ability to integrate the new knowledge they are gaining with what they already know.
- The opportunity to test their knowledge and put it to work in creative and practical problem solving.
- And a chance to learn important skills like communication, teamwork, and leadership.

Psychologist, educator and renowned professor John Dewey defined education as "a continuous process of reconstruction of experience." By that definition, we are all lifelong students. We do not just sit back passively and let life happen, but we are actively engaged in the continually reconstructing our experience and our understanding as we discover new knowledge and as the world changes around us.

Whether we are searching for new knowledge in the research lab, or preparing for a career in business or industry, or working to help Georgia Tech to define the technological university of the 21st century, everyone on our campus – students, faculty, and staff – is a learner somewhere on the spectrum. And our goal is to create an optimal learning environment for everyone.

Even though we have a focus on technology, even though we are tremendous research engine, Georgia Tech still excels at its original mission – to educate "a hell of an engineer." Your initiative and efforts to improve your teaching skills help to make education at Georgia Tech more alive, more interactive, and more intriguing. And I am glad to have this opportunity to say thank you.