GTL still adding programs, students after 20 years

By Andrew Nelson
Staff Writer

Tech's first and largest satellite campus, Georgia Tech Lorraine (GTL) in Metz, France, has provided its students an international campus-away-from-campus for 20 years this week.

Hundreds of people attended celebrations in Metz, including, for the first time, Institute President G.P. "Bud" Peterson. A representative from the Georgia Department of Economic Development, CEO of Coca-Cola Enterprises, President of Coca-Cola France and the French Consul General were also present. Georgia and local French education officials agreed to commence exchanges of faculty, students and ideas, and the former Mayor of Metz, Jean-Marie Rausch, received an Honorary Alumnus Award from the Georgia Tech Alumni Association.

One of the long-term initiatives undertaken at this institutional milestone is the France-Atlanta: Together Toward Innovation project. The most notable of the project's points was the signing of a letter of intent between Tech, GTL and French government representatives to officially create the Lafayette Institute. Its mission is to develop commercialization of research at GTL, especially opto-electronics–technology that combines electronics and light, like solar cells. The French institutions intend to provide 25,000 square feet of lab space and offices and €10 million (over $12 million) worth of equipment.

Metz and Atlanta will both host workshops related to the France-Atlanta project for fields such as drugs, medical devices, high-speed trains, water management and recycling.

Peterson said GTL complements the recently-drafted 25-year strategic vision for the institute, and Tech is "committed to fostering international alliances to enhance learning experiences, build research collaborations and promote economic development."

Lorraine is one of 26 administrative régions of France, with Metz as its capital, comparable to upstate New York in terms of economy, geography and blend of cultures. Tech established its campus in Metz, near French engineering research universities. In the following years, GTL partnered closely with those universities, and in 2006 established the first joint research center in France, UMI GT-CNRS 2958, which specializes in secure networks, new materials, robotics and intelligent environment platforms.

"GTL meets my expectations in terms of research-oriented courses, with very good teachers that make me eager to go further in the topic and work on my own, not just attend classes and learn just for the exams like I did in my French school," said Nordine Sebkhi, a French ECE grad student. Sebkhi is in the double diploma program with GTL and a French engineering university.

"Also, the content of the class was very clear and well explained, which helped me to be more concentrated during classes and to be more effective," Sebhki said.

"When I see the transformation of our students as they combine their rigorous Georgia Tech education with a cultural experience of a lifetime, living abroad, discovering Europe or the United States, making lasting international friendships, being challenged with internships or research in a truly global environment, I know we are indeed preparing our students for the 21st century," said Yves H. Berthelot, GTL President, in a message on the campus's website.

"I came to GTL thinking that I was just going to be able to study abroad and see some cool places, which is true; however, what I did not expect was to have the experience of a lifetime. I have already been to seven countries, and I have learned so much about the culture. I have been able to see some of the most historic parts of the planet, and I have been able to absorb the culture," said Hunter Hammond, second-year MGT major. He noted that his most memorable experience was meeting and discussing international issues with Coca-Cola CEO as part of the 20-year celebration.

Academics, both undergraduate and graduate, at GTL are still expanding for the five hundred students who study there each year. What started as an electrical and computer engineering master's degree program has expanded to include mechanical engineering and computer science. European students can attend GTL as part of its dual degree program, in partnership with the local institutions Supélec, UTC and Arts et Métiers Paris Tech.

"I decided to join Tech, because it is the best program we have with my school and...I would like to work in the US because of the great opportunity and experience I will have," Sebkhi said.

"I think that having two diplomas from France and the US will help me to get a better position in a company, in terms of responsibility, salary and management," Sebkhi said.

The program offers undergraduate students a balance of classes in engineering, French language, management and social sciences.

"The campus of GTL amounts to one building which contains all the amenities and activities you would expect at GT [in Atlanta] but in one place. The one thing I liked more than anything else about GTL was class size," said Joshua Tuttle, a fifth-year EE major.

"Because my largest class contained 16 students, the relationship between [the] professor and student was much closer and therefore any question that arose could easily be asked of the professor. Most of the classes at GTL try to incorporate some aspect of the school's location into the material, therefore providing a unique aspect of classes that can not be received elsewhere," Tuttle said.

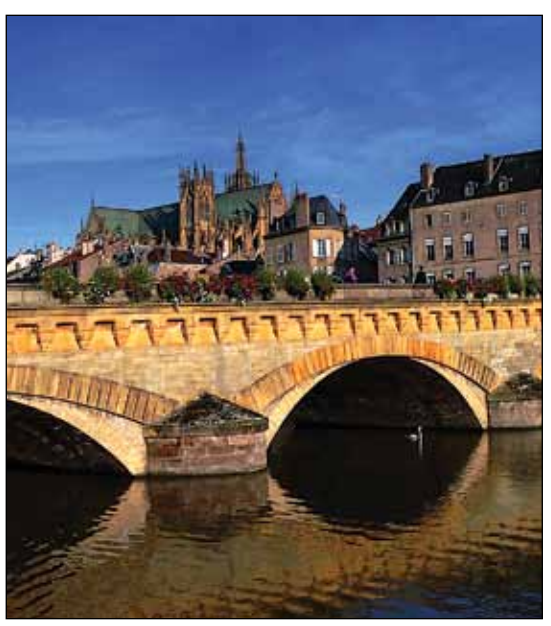
Admission requirements are good academic standing, a minimum 2.3 GPA and minimum credit hours taken at GTL depending on the term. GTL also has a special cost of tuition: Georgia residents pay a reduced amount, and non-residents pay the same reduced amount plus $2,000.

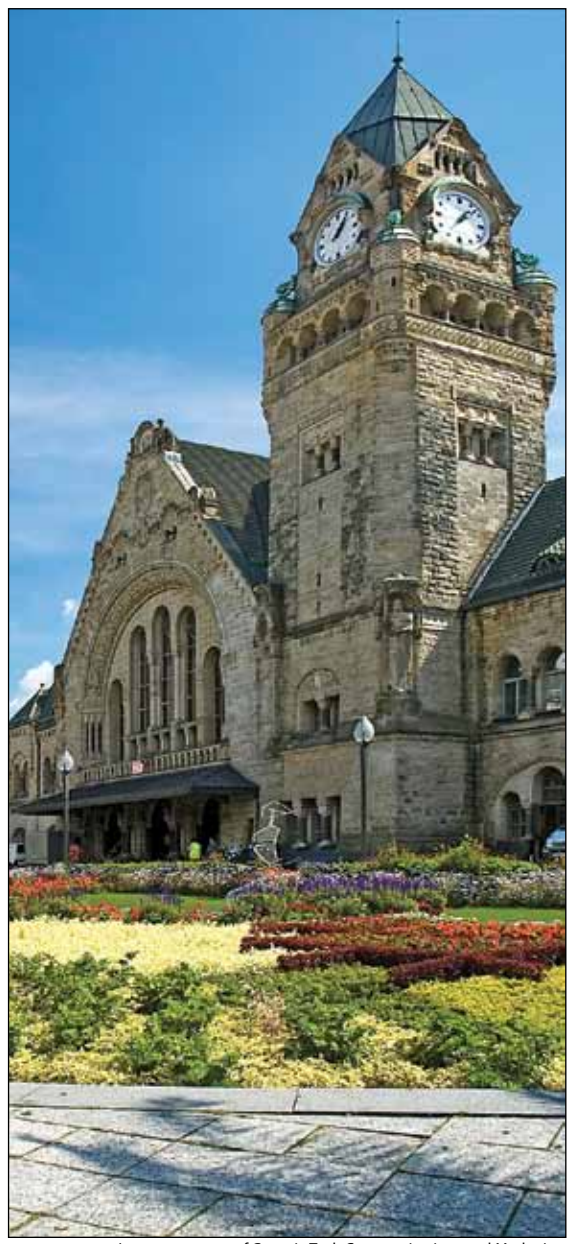
Classes are taught in English, but learning basic French is highly recommended. A significant undertaking by both GTL student organizations and the school itself is to immerse students in their new locale and learning the local language will aid this process.

"As globalization makes our world smaller, it is important to be accustomed to interacting and living in a culture not our own. This importance lies not only within future careers but also in our personal...lives. GTL allows for easy travel to many different cultures and locales over just a few weekends. GTL has changed my life entirely, after spending two long semesters at GTL I have realized how alike and different not only the French culture is but also European culture in general. I feel like I have actually lived in another country rather then just studying abroad," Tuttle said.

Student organizations like GTL's own student government Bureau des Étudiants, of which Tuttle is Vice President and Sebkhi is Communications Manager, host activities on campus, the Metz area and beyond.

"One of the most interesting parts of working for GTL's Student Government was the fact that we interacted with other schools in the city to provide unique activities with local students," Tuttle said.





Images courtesy of Georgia Tech Communications and Marketing

Top-left: St. Stephen's Cathedral, one of the sights in Metz, France. Bottom-left: A bridge in Metz. Right: The train station in Metz, one of the many hubs enabling students to travel through Europe.

Wall encourages students to expand horizons

By Kamna Bohra
Focus Editor

Originally from Seattle, Wash., traveling long distances for his passion for engineering is no stranger to Thomas Wall, who recently won the prestigious J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship to spend a total of nine months studying and researching at the University of Amsterdam and Oxford University.

Wall is currently a Ph.D student in the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering and plans to conduct research on transportation policy in Europe, focusing on retrofitting infrastructure based on climate change.

According to Wall, modern infrastructure designs are for a climate that is normalized, but now, with the suggestion that there will be an increase in the frequency and impact of storms, engineers must selectively fix old infrastructure and develop new design plans for new ones, all while properly managing budget.

As such, Wall plans to study infrastructure management at Oxford and transportation planning at Amsterdam.

Wall places heavy importance on establishing an interest in engineering early on, as he is active in the Tech chapter of Engineers Without Borders, in which he focuses on promoting high school research efforts.

"I think it's really important to get out to people in the high schools, even if it's just to generate a bit of interest in engineering," Wall said. He emphasized a need for more engineers in the future.

For the past two summers, Wall and other members of the CE department have worked with a teacher from Westlake High School, immersing him in the CE research to develop a transportation planning teaching model for his introduction to engineering course.

Wall describes his own entrance into the field of civil engineering as largely an influence of the people around him. His time at the University of Oregon shaped his views.

"My grandpa was a civil engineer, so the idea was sort of comfortable. I switched [from ME] to CE after my freshman year. The people in the program were like my family," Wall said.

"[But] it's not like I've always had this vision of doing CE. When I joined, I hadn't even thought of transportation initially," Wall said. He mentioned a previous experience in which an interviewer asked him if he liked cars, planes and boats, as a credential for enjoying engineering.

Wall chose to come to Tech, over University of California, Berkeley, for his postgraduate work because of the Institute's nationally competitive program in transportation engineering and once again, because of the friendliness of the faculty and students in the program.

Wall plans to pursue a career as a college professor.

"[It's] not only for the research aspect…but also the teaching aspect, [which] would be extremely rewarding and important," Wall said.

Wall is also considering careers in consultancy and work in the public sector with the federal government or the state Department of Transportation.

"[Tech's] Fulbright recipients are not just going to learn in another country. They are also contributing their own knowledge," said Karen Adams, interim director of Tech's Fellowship Communication Program, in a press release.

As advice for students who aspire to the Fulbright, Wall recommends having two to three months to produce a personal statement and a statement of grant purpose, but cannot underscore how helpful the support of his advisors and professors.

His process was initiated when he learned that the Fulbright applies to engineering students, along with science students.

Wall believes the most rewarding aspect of the Fulbright is that it is a vehicle for international research.

"It's not just a one-way street of benefits for the US. It's meant to be a two-way exchange between research in the US and research abroad. I think [many] of the EU's policies can be applied with some reworking to the US, and there are good infrastructural management methods in the US that could be brought to the EU," Wall said.

The board also offered Fulbright scholarships to two other Tech students. Alice Wang, EE '10, and Hunter Causey, MS CE were recognized for their accomplishments and aspirations for work in international research.

The youngest of the three Tech Fulbright Scholars, Wang plans to study computer applications to conflict resolution, creating a culmination of her engineering degree and her minors in Economics and Law, Science and Technology.

Meanwhile, Causey plans to spend 10 months in Mongolia to study the effects of climate change on the Tuul River and its people, as his global outdoor adventures have allowed him to develop an appreciative desire to protect "one of the world's most pristine river systems."

Images courtesy of Georgia Tech Communications and Marketing

Thomas Wall is a Ph.D candidate in the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering. One of his interests is infrastructure.