

Georgia Tech has stated that our goal is to develop “graduates that care.” We have a long history of producing graduates that assume leadership positions and many have made a positive impact on society. As the world faces more complex challenges it is incumbent on Georgia Tech to insure that our students are exposed to those values that are critical to creating just, caring, and sustainable societies. Too often students are armed with the technical competencies needed to succeed in the workplace but are not afforded opportunities to explore the role of their personal values and those of the organization in their lives.

Much has been written concerning the shift of higher education from a public to a private benefit. As Zemsky, Massey, and Wegner state in *Remaking the American University: Market Smart and Mission Centered*: “At one time, universities educated new generations and were a source of social change. Today, colleges and universities are less places of public purpose than agencies of personal advantage.”

The powers of the market, competition, and national ranking have combined to influence the values driving our institutions of higher education. Much of the emphasis in our colleges and universities is placed on improving their rank on the *US News & World Report’s* “America’s Best Colleges” list. Vast financial resources are directed towards building dorms and student activities centers that cater to the comfort and entertainment of students. The competitive nature of higher education demands that colleges and universities keep pace with potential rivals and offer environments that address the desires of students. The need for prestige and image are often reflected in buildings, celebrity faculty, and corporate endorsements.

These trends have a corrosive impact, sometimes silently so, on the underlying values of education. In *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, Margaret Wheatley reminds us of how subtle this process can be:

“This devolution of core values frequently happens to individuals, organizations, and nations. It’s a gradual and nearly invisible process where values quite contrary to those we treasure seep in and grow in power as we do our work. As these contrary values are used in more and more decisions, higher principles recede into the background and have little influence. We may still think they matter, but they aren’t guiding our behavior. Usually, it takes a crisis and deep distress for us to look honestly at ourselves and notice who we’ve become.”

Alexander Astin suggests that we teach not only in the classroom, but also by our actions. These efforts to enhance our credentials and image through external ratings, physical surroundings, and financial attributes (e.g., the size of an institution’s endowment) may be contributing to our students’ zeal for possessions, power, and prestige. Moreover, higher education is becoming a sorting mechanism and filtering device for the professions. While this is not an unimportant aspect of education, by no means is it the only one.

An educational process that fails to acknowledge its primary responsibility in developing an engaged citizenry serves neither education nor the wellbeing of society. The correct goal is not only education of the head, but also of the heart. This broad concept of education serves society by helping to develop necessary civic skills: independent and critical thinking, awareness of and thoughtfulness about values, and an understanding of the dynamic nature of global systems.

Georgia Tech seeks to address these issues by engaging faculty and staff in thoughtful discussions about their values and how those values are reflected in their programs, behaviors, and policies. Our aim is to facilitate conversations concerning the development of programs and activities that reflect those values critical to producing citizens who discern their gifts and discover ways to contribute to society.

Georgia Tech does an excellent job of instilling the kinds of values students need to survive and cope in the world. These values include economic/profit, management, achievement/success, family/belonging, and education/certification. These values are vital to the individual and to those organizations that comprise the global society. However, there are also values that reflect a world-view in which individuals seek to discover their talents and to use them to create just, caring, and sustainable societies. These include values of discernment, equality/liberation, integration/wholeness, stewardship, synergy, word, interdependence, and global harmony. By their very nature they tend to be rooted in forms of spirituality. What unites them is that they are critical in developing individuals and organizations that can collaborate with others to address the needs of society. While there are programs and activities at Georgia Tech that strive to instill these values, we believe there is a need for more intentional efforts.

The interdisciplinary Institute for Leadership and Entrepreneurship has created the Leadership Roundtable to facilitate a dialogue within Georgia Tech on the values most needed by students to enable them to address the complex and interconnected issues facing the world. The Leadership Roundtable will provide participants with an opportunity to understand their personal values and explore avenues to express them through their teaching, research, and administrative duties. It is our belief this program will strengthen our academic community and enhance value-based leadership. This, accompanied by systemic institutional changes, will lead to a better understanding of how Georgia Tech can become more intentional in transmitting critical values to our students. If we are successful, we may not “save the world,” in Vaclav Havel’s words, but certainly we can help “contribute to its salvation.”

We invite you to nominate members of your faculty and staff that may benefit by this program. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Robert Thomas