Advanced computing facility fuels collaborative spirit

Elizabeth Campbell
Institute Communications and Public Affairs

Alumni, dignitaries, students, faculty and staff celebrated the grand opening of the Christopher W. Klaus Advanced Computing Building, during two days of activities last week signaling the importance of Georgia Tech and Atlanta as leaders in the digital economy.

At the official ribbon cutting ceremony on Oct. 26, the building’s namesake spoke of his ties to Georgia Tech and the importance of giving back to the university.

“I’ve given this gift out of gratitude to what Georgia Tech was able to give me,” said Klaus, a former student who founded Internet Security Systems. “By bringing together the brightest minds in one building, I hope it will become an incubator of innovation and collaborating to change the world.”

The educational and research facility will house students and faculty members from the College of Computing and the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE).

“This building fosters collaboration,” said Richard DeMillo, dean of the College of Computing. “This building not only bears your name but captures your vision of collaboration for generations to come.”

The two entities currently collaborate through the Center for Experimental Research in Computer Systems, the Georgia Tech Information Security Center and the new Center for Robotics and Intelligent Machines.

“For years, faculty in the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering and the College of Computing have been serving as interim dean for more than six months. Earlier this month, he was named assistant vice president and dean of students.

Stein came to Tech in 2002 as the director of Success Programs. When former dean of students Gail DiSabatino left Tech earlier this year, he was asked to serve until a successor could be found. When it became clear to the search committee that its national search was not yielding the results it had hoped for, the focus was switched to an internal search.

Stein put his name forward.

“John received tremendous support from students, faculty and staff during the process and that will be invaluable as he undertakes many important student life initiatives and programs in his new role,” said William Schafer, vice president for Student Affairs. “I believe he can become another great dean of students in the series of outstanding individuals that have held this important position at Tech. I am delighted he is joining our Student Affairs team as the dean of students and look forward to working with him.”

“‘I see it as my mission to carry on the historical legacy and good work the former deans have done over time,”

New dean of students named

David Terraso
Institute Communications and Public Affairs

After an extensive search, Interim Dean of Students John Stein has been asked to make his post a permanent one. Stein has been serving as interim dean for more than six months. Earlier this month, he was named assistant vice president and dean of students.

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Students continued, page 2

With technology, audience becomes the soloist

Matt Nagel
Institute Communications and Public Affairs

College of Architecture Assistant Professor Jason Freeman is bringing his musical passion to the Internet and letting his audiences shape the music they’ll hear in performance. The Graph Theory Project is an online interface that enables users to compose their own path through a solo violin piece.

“Basically, what people are doing is choosing their own adventure; they are finding their own path through this piece of music,” said Freeman.

“There are a lot of different fragments of music and different ways you can connect them. I composed the piece intuitively. I decided what the fragments were going to be and the different ways they could connect.”

The online user is then able to choose among two or three options in between each fragment of music. Their choice directly impacts the direction of the composition. At the end of each night, the software produces a new version of the musical score that reflects the audience’s choices made online.

Music continued, page 3

GTMAG celebrates Homecoming

Gen. Dan K. McNeill, commanding general for the U.S. Army Forces Command, was the featured speaker at last week’s inaugural Homecoming reception for the Georgia Tech Military Affinity Group (GTMAG). Chartered by the Alumni Association earlier this year, the group is a network of Tech alumni, faculty, staff, students and friends who have a military affiliation and civilians affiliated with the Department of Defense. GTMAG plans additional activities from Nov. 6-11 in recognition of Military Appreciation Week.
common ground

But perhaps the biggest challenge is Stein's desire to work with faculty to create bridges from student life to academic life. One area where that's sorely needed, he said, is in improving the quality of life and promoting intellectual discussion outside of the classroom.

"Tech students are the brightest population of students I've worked with and they have tremendous potential to transform Tech and the world beyond, but if something is absent on this campus it's dialogue," he said. "We have such a multifaceted student body, that at times the students don't know how to talk to each other and don't know how to talk with people who are different from them."

One of the central questions Stein has challenged himself to answer, he said is "how do we maximize student involvement, given that Tech has such a range of cultures, beyond a way that's superficial?"

It's a difficult job, he admitted. After sitting in on a number of classes, Stein said he realized that Tech is very good at imparting intellectual knowledge into its students through the standard lecture format. But one thing students don't get a lot of practice doing at Tech is in dealing with ambiguities. Creating that bridge between student life and academic life will supplement the education they get in the classroom and better prepare them for life beyond Tech, he said.

"They're used to information flowing one way, from the professor to the student. They're not used to having an exchange of information and that can make it hard for them to deal with situations in which there isn't just one right answer," Stein said.

"One engineering student told me he has difficulty in situations where he can't plug in numbers and get an answer. But through his work in student organizations, he has learned to deal with situations where he can't plug in a number — where he has to deal with ambiguities."

Working with students to get them to initiate discussion is the key to helping Tech improve in these areas. A prime example of that, he said, is the Finding Common Ground series.

After a series of speech incidents involving student groups and a lawsuit against Tech by two of students, the students decided they wanted to find a way in which they could better understand each other. As a result, a variety of student organizations, with the support of the administration, have developed what they hope is a first step in promoting civility and intellectual discussion on campus.

Consisting of a series of dialogues among students and culminating with an address by poet Maya Angelou on Nov. 15 in the coliseum, Finding Common Ground is an attempt by the students to learn how to be comfortable when dealing with their differences and engage in discussion and disagreements constructively.

Stein has been instrumental in working with students to get this series off the ground.

The best solutions arise when students initiate things and have the support of the administration, said Stein. "It's my job to help them do that."

For more information...
Office of the Dean of Students
www.deanofstudents.gatech.edu
Online encyclopedia created as collaborative resource

Barbara Christopher
College of Architecture

Web developers at Georgia Tech’s Center for Assistive Technology and Environmental Access (CATEA) recently announced the release of ATWiki, an online encyclopedia on assistive technology.

The word wiki comes from a Hawaiian word meaning “fast,” and commonly refers to any Web site using a software engine that allows users to read, add, modify and delete content very quickly. Assistive technology (AT) refers to any device or aid that can help a person with a disability perform activities that might otherwise be difficult or impossible.

CATEA’s ATWiki serves as a collaborative, online encyclopedia on AT. It includes complete articles, research briefs, definitions, demonstrations of AT and links to other resources.

“The ATWiki is a powerful tool for sharing AT knowledge worldwide, for the simple reason that anyone, AT professional or user, can freely share research, experience and opinions with everyone,” said Robert Todd, CATEA research scientist and project director.

The ATWiki was designed for any AT user, relays and caregivers of those that use AT, rehabilitation professionals, educators and researchers. It is free and public, and can be viewed and edited by anyone with access to a Web browser.

“We encourage the AT community to contribute original content, review others’ writing, and link together and categorize information in ways that they think are appropriate,” said Catlie Carroll, graduate research assistant for the project. ‘A wild is a system of ‘living documents,’ which encourages non-linear discussion that may be valuable to users that eschew mailing lists or forums. It also allows for a living, growing encyclopedia of AT information, authored by the AT community as a whole.”

For more information: ATWiki atwiki.assistivetech.net

A range of assistive technology topics are addressed in CATEA’s new knowledge resource.

Freeman says the solo violin piece will then be played in live concerts to give the audiences a more interactive experience.

“The Graph Theory Project forces the audience to make choices and engage in the process of making music,” said Freeman. “Some of the greatest musical experiences that I’ve had were creating music, not just listening to it. I can’t write a piece that expresses that joy unless the composition shares it.”

Freeman says that he was inspired to create a piece that would allow people to engage in music even if they didn’t have a traditional music background.

“It is hard for people to talk about music in abstract terms using layman’s language,” Freeman said. “I had an idea of a virtual composer residing. There is a visual interface on the Web that structures people’s input. It gives them choices that are defined. They are not defined in language, they are defined through things they can click on and move around.”

Freeman suggests that technology and a good graphic design make this a successful project.

“Technology is an interface through which we can connect people,” said Freeman. “It allows people to be musically creative without needing to know how to play a traditional instrument.”

The Graph Theory Project, which was commissioned by the Turbulence Internet art group and sponsored with a grant from the Greenwall Foundation, is available via the Web at www.turbulence.org/Works/graphtheory.

The Sonic Generator, a new ensemble-in-residence at Georgia Tech that’s been sponsored by the GVU Center and organized by the Music Department will have its first concert Tuesday, Nov. 14. The ensemble consists of Atlanta area musicians (many of whom play with the Atlanta Symphony) and explores ways to use new technologies in musical composition, performance and listening. One of the pieces will feature Georgia Tech’s robotic drummer, Haile. The concert will be held at the alumni house at 8 p.m. and is free and open to the public. For more information, visit www.sonicgenerator.gatech.edu.

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