The View from Here
by Monica Halka

Ever since making my students calculate their carbon footprints in an Energy and Society class a few years ago, and then figuring mine, I’ve felt guilty about air travel. So, in planning for the National Collegiate Honors Council conference in New Orleans last month, I looked into other options. I did not want to drive for ten hours, but the train sounded like a fun mini-adventure, and the $72 fare made it even more appealing. I had ridden Amtrak a couple of times recently from Portland to Eugene, Oregon, so I knew they had wi-fi, a glass observation car, and good food. That had been only a two-hour trip, but twelve seemed manageable. I clicked “Book a ticket.”

As the day approached, I was excited for a romantic train trip through the deep South. And I was thrilled to avoid the airport: no security lines and no baggage fee. I looked forward to a seat with leg room and no safety belt. Of course, I didn’t foresee everything. There’s no parking near the train station, for one thing. So I took a taxi, being sure to arrive early (7 a.m.), only to find the station closed. A cold half hour later, I was able to enter the cold station and wait on a cold bench until we were able to board the train ten minutes before it was scheduled to depart. After boarding, however, all was well. I found a row to myself, arranged my belongings for a long ride, and settled in. The seat was large and comfortable, reclined at least 20 degrees more than in an airplane, and had adjustable foot rests. Nice. We pulled out with a rumble and a whistle, and I was happy.

After a couple of hours mindlessly watching the fall foliage flow by, I decided to pull out the computer and check email. Or not. No wi-fi on this line. Oh, never mind, I would head for the observation car. Nope, nonexistent. How about a nice snack? If you like hamburgers, you’re in luck. Fortunately, I had brought apples and granola and a water supply, so I was set. I had a good book, and the passengers were all friendly and talkative. That turned out to be the best part. I got to practice my novice Spanish with two women from Spain and Argentina. The 92-year-old gentleman across the aisle regaled me with amusing stories of cross-country train travel, and the conductor told jokes. A lovely time was had—for about eight hours. Twelve is a bit grueling, however, making me grateful I’d booked a return flight.

Nonetheless, I recommend it. It slows you down. It lets you feel the distance. And you save carbon.

Welcome to the Mid-Semester Freshman Applicants Accepted to the Honors Program!

Samridhi Banskota, BME
Yasmeen Belhseine, BME
Suvarat Bhooshan, CS
Annette Cochran, BA
Juliet Dong, PHYS
Kevin Han, CS
Trent McDaniel, AE

Kyle Murray, BME
Tiffany Nguyen, PSY
Jihwan Oh, IE
Arshia Rajan, IE
Ritika Ravichandra, CS
Catherine Stephens, PSY
The Third Annual Liam’s Legacy Symposium:
A Campus with a Social Conscience

by Sara Hojjatie

Is Georgia Tech “A Campus with a Social Conscience”—or can it become one? That question provided the focus for the third annual Liam’s Legacy Symposium, which took place on Thursday, November 14, 2013 at the Clary Theatre in the Bill Moore Student Success Center. The evening invited members of the Georgia Tech community to come together in the spirit of Georgia Tech’s Strategic Plan, which lays out ambitious goals for the next twenty-five years to “focus on societal benefit and improving the human condition.” On the whole, the symposium challenged us to make Georgia Tech’s motto of “Progress and Service”—particularly Service—a true mark of the Institute’s identity.

This year’s event featured an exceptionally strong panel of speakers from both Georgia Tech and other prominent academic institutions. Dr. John Wilson, the President of Morehouse College, gave the keynote address, emphasizing the necessity for students to find the balance between doing well and doing good in their professional lives. The other panelists—Dr. Sheri Davis-Faulkner, Georgia Tech Research Associate; Ms. Kate Grace, Director of the Community Building Fellows Program at Emory University; and Dr. Harley Etienne, former Tech faculty member and now Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Michigan—highlighted their own personal and professional experiences as socially-engaged scholars and activists.

For the past three years, the Honors Program has held the Liam’s Legacy Symposium to honor the memory of Liam Rattray (1989-2011), an outstanding and socially-committed Honors Program student who was killed in a motorcycle accident on Memorial Day 2011, just weeks after he graduated from Georgia Tech with his Bachelor’s degree in Public Policy. This loss was a stunning blow to Atlanta’s sustainability community and all the people whose lives Liam touched. Liam was raised in Atlanta and was one of the city’s most promising young environmental leaders, co-founding Students Organizing for Sustainability and laying out the groundwork for Georgia Tech’s campus garden, agriculture program, and sustainable dining committee. His reach extended well beyond the campus setting to community organizations that included Georgia Organics, Atlanta Local Food Initiative, East Atlanta Farmers Market, Truly Living Well Farms, Southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance, and many more. Liam’s commitment to sustainability and social justice provides a compelling model for intellectual and civic engagement for us all, no matter what our age.

Among the current Honors Program students who attended the symposium that night, second-year BME student Karisma Gupta observed that “It was great seeing the Honors Program come together as a community for this event, especially to honor a former member and with the goal of improving the social conscience of the community. My favorite part is listening to the speakers talk about their past experiences and about their ideas for sustainability. I definitely plan on attending the symposium again next year.”

If you missed Liam’s Legacy this year but would still like to participate in an annual event that focuses on engagement and activism, make an online commitment now to participate in the Liam Rattray Day of Service, which occurs in May. This event is organized by Generation Green, the Georgia Conservancy, members of Atlanta’s sustainability movement, urban farmers, and friends of Liam. Participants gather to maintain the gardens at Truly Living Well, an organization and a place that was very special to Liam Rattray.

The five Liam’s Legacy panelists display a remarkable camaraderie and passion for carrying forward the spirit of Liam. Each panelist either knew Liam personally or took the time to thoroughly investigate his life and work. Pictured from left to right: Dr. John Wilson, Ms. Kate Grace, Dr. Sheri Davis-Faulkner, Dr. Harley Etienne, and Dr. Greg Nobles.
Congratulations, Graduates!
The Honors Program would like to recognize our graduating class of Fall 2013.

Shaan Arora, MGT
Dimple Bansal, IE
Kshama Bhyravabhotla, BIO
Daniel Branton, CM
Michael Butler, EE
Rebecca Byler, BME
Nathaniel Edwards, IE
Joshua Goldstein, AE
Ajay Gupta, IE

Bryan Hostetler, BCHM
Joshua Longenecker, ME
Harsimran Mann, IE
Shannon O’Shea, ME
Sarah Reed, BME
Michael Remensnyder, IE
Bradley Silverman, CHBE
Chima Umeakunne, PSY
Lindsay Wenndt, BC

The Matheson-Perry dorm is the Homecoming 2013 winner in the Housing Block! Congratulations to our first-year students in residence who participated!
Message from the Director

by Dr. Gregory Nobles

The Underground of Decency Goes into the Open—and Grows

Back in the mid-1980s and early ‘90s, when I was still in my first few years at Georgia Tech, I used to talk about the “Underground of Decency,” the small circle of faculty and staff friends at the Institute who were doing the right thing—or at least the things that weren’t otherwise being done much. Usually very quietly, without much institutional support and sometimes with more than a little opposition, these admirable allies were reaching out to the surrounding community, making common cause with our underserved and sometimes unseen neighbors, and working with a sense of social conscience, which they tried to encourage in their colleagues and students. I could name most of them—there weren’t that many, so it wouldn’t take long—but now most of them have retired or otherwise left Tech, and their students have moved on too.

But their truth goes marching on, and now more and more people have joined the march. Today, I’m happy to say, there’s no Underground of Decency because the sort of work my friends did back then, more or less on the margins, has now moved closer to the center of campus life and become the norm—almost, anyway. I look around Georgia Tech and I’m remarkably heartened by all that I see. We have several community-focused CASE Studies in the Honors Program, of course, but also a growing number of other such academic activities elsewhere, ranging from Ellen Zegura’s Computing for Good in the College of Computing to Rudy Gleason’s work on global health in Mechanical Engineering to Kelly Comfort’s remarkable outreach to the Latina community in Modern Languages. The good news now, in fact, is that I can’t come close to naming them all.

And then we have no end of socially-committed student organizations. I think immediately of the Techwood Tutorial Project (TTP), which is coming up on its fiftieth anniversary, in 2014; Mobilizing Opportunities for Volunteer Experience (MOVE), which started in the late ‘80s; Engineers Without Borders (EWB), Foundation for the International Medical Relief of Children (FIMRC), and the list goes on and on.

I keep hearing it, and it may really be true: The time is right for Georgia Tech to make community engagement, both global and local, a central part of the Institute’s identity. The Honors Program’s recent Liam’s Legacy Symposium (see the related story on page 2) addressed the issue of “A Campus with a Social Conscience,” and the packed-house audience heard some wise and inspiring messages from our friends from other institutions. We also have our own excellent resource, the Westside Community Alliance, which shows us a smart approach to working in partnership with our immediate neighbors. And now we have a new Service Learning and Community Engagement council, which reaches across all six of Tech’s colleges and hopes to become a force for promoting and coordinating a variety of community-focused initiatives.

The real challenge, of course, is not just to recognize all the good work that’s going on and encourage more; it’s to make socially-responsible citizenship a cornerstone of campus culture, embedded in the entire curriculum and energizing every organization. We’re not there yet, but we seem to be moving in the right direction.

I’m sure my old friends in the Underground of Decency would be happy and gratified to see that.

Have you seen our new social media sites? Be sure to follow us for updates.

www.honorsprogram.gatech.edu