Cultivating Community: Meet Christopher Burke

VICTOR ROGERS
INSTITUTE COMMUNICATIONS

As director of Community Relations in the Office of Government and Community Relations, Christopher Burke spends his days enriching current relationships and cultivating new ones on behalf of the Institute.

The relationships include the immediate neighborhoods surrounding campus, the state of Georgia, and the public school system.

“We have a unique role in our office because we are outward facing,” Burke said. “Our full-time focus is external. When you engage externally, you get to hold up a mirror and really see what the outside world thinks of you. Whether you think you’re doing well or not, the outside world will let you know.”

Burke and his Community Relations staff regularly receive feedback from hundreds of visiting students, parents, and teachers. The department works with schools and centers across campus to bring students from metro Atlanta and beyond to campus to see engineering and computing demos to get excited about STEM. One impactful event the office holds twice a year, Middle Grades Discover Georgia Tech, brings 200-240 students to campus. They divide the students into groups of about 25 students per rotation to keep them actively engaged.

“There is universal excitement among the students about the visits,” Burke said. “We approach the visits with the overall goal of exposure. It’s about helping to pique the students’ curiosity. The more they can get engaged in their own education and what they want to pursue. For a lot of kids, they won’t necessarily know what engineering is until they have the opportunity to touch, feel, or see something.”

Burke said that Community Relations takes pride in...
Events

Arts and Culture

Nov. 30

Georgia Tech’s Women’s Choir hosts a fall concert from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. in Room 175, West Villages.

music.gatech.edu

Nov. 30

Georgia Tech’s Rock/Pop Ensemble hosts a fall concert from 8 to 10 p.m. at Under the Couch, second floor, Student Center.

music.gatech.edu

Through Jan. 31, 2019

The Office of the Arts hosts the Faculty/Staff Art Exhibit at the Frist Center for the Arts.

arts.gatech.edu

Seminars and Lectures

Nov. 28

Human Resources hosts a Be Well session on Powers of Attorney from 11 a.m. to noon in Room 320, Student Center. RSVP at hr.gatech.edu/bewell

Nov. 28

Mostafa El-Sayed and Ashok Goel will discuss their work and experience at a Revolutionaries lecture hosted by the Student Government Association at 6 p.m. at the Historic Academy of Medicine.

sga.gatech.edu

Dec. 3

Kim Cobb and Younan Xia will discuss their work and experience at a Revolutionaries lecture hosted by the Student Government Association at 6 p.m. at the Historic Academy of Medicine.

sga.gatech.edu

Dec. 5

The Blockchain Roundtable will bring together faculty, scientists, students, and industry experts interested in applications of the blockchain technology, from 1 to 7:30 p.m. at the Historic Academy of Medicine.

sga.gatech.edu

Dec. 12

Georgia Tech’s Smart Cities and Inclusive Innovation initiative and Newsweek host a seminar on How Driverless Cars Will Change the World, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Technology Square Research Building.

smartcities.gatech.edu

Library

To Jan. 6, 2019

Library employees will work out of the Clough Undergraduate Learning Commons, with employees available at the second floor Core Desk from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays. Users will be able to request gadgets and return materials at this desk.

Requests for library materials will continue to be made through the Library’s website, and delivery will continue from the Library Service Center through the transition.

Users might experience delays or service interruptions due to a software upgrade scheduled to take place Dec. 14–17.

The switch from Price Gilbert to Crosland marks the last phase of the Library Next project, a five-year transition that has seen the renovation of one building, opening of the Library Service Center with Emory University, and reimagining of how the Library uses its space and serves its users.

The project is scheduled to be complete in 2020, with the reopening of Price Gilbert and new connectivity between the two buildings.

Learn more about the project at librarynext.gatech.edu.
not turning away any group or individual who wants to visit campus. He said that, depending on the community, people may be skeptical of the Institute’s intentions. But, he said most groups welcome the idea of the Institute doing something to enrich the lives of their children.

For Burke, being able to engage with young minds is the most rewarding part of his job. “I see the joy on their faces, whether they’re middle school students coming here for a one-day experience or high school students who I get to spend a little more time with,” he said.

In addition to working in Community Relations, Burke co-teaches an Honors Program special topics course, Near Peer Mentoring: An Urban Education Experience (HTS 2813), with Carol Subano Sullivan, senior academic professional with the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL).

Burke said the course spawned from an observation about seven years ago that, at the time, there were only about 40 Tech students who came from the Atlanta Public Schools system.

Burke worked with CTL to apply for the Near Peer Mentoring Challenge Grant. They received the grant, and Burke and Sullivan designed the course to look at the obstacles preventing Atlanta Public Schools students from attending Tech.

“It’s challenging because the data that you’re combing through paints a very grim story about what happens in urban education circles,” he said. “There is such a wide gap in terms of the rigor that students in predominately low-income communities get to experience. There’s also a lack of belief in themselves and what they think they can do. It goes back to the exposure issue.”

In the course, Tech students spend one day in class and one day at Atlanta Public Schools’ BEST Academy doing one-on-one mentoring with middle school students. The goal is for the high school students to apply to and attend a four-year university.

“It’s very impactful for the high school students, but the immediate impact is on our Tech students,” Burke said. “There isn’t a week that goes by that I don’t hear from a Tech alumnus regarding something in their professional life that reminds them of the work we did in the class or draws them back to want to do more.”

Burke said his work always reminds him of the responsibility that comes from Georgia Tech being a public university. “We create a lot of jobs and contribute patented technologies to the world. But I’m cognizant of the fact that many of the children in the communities we talk to are not going to attend Tech,” he said. “Their parents work in jobs where what we do at Tech has little to no impact on their lives. So, what more can we do to honor ourselves as a public entity to those who have less? I think about that all of the time.”

He said that one answer largely lies with working with children, and he recently wrote a paper in an economic development journal outlining details.

“A key contribution universities can make for economic development is through opportunities to deeply engage primary and secondary grade students in activities that could lead them to pursue a STEM career,” Burke said.

“We can’t be everything to everybody,” he said, “but we can be mindful and try to meet people where they are.”

**BURKE, from page 1**

Burke’s office is decorated with items from his mother’s travels.

Music, Music, Music

When he isn’t working, Burke is a frequent concert-goer, avid music lover, and a musician. In his suburban Chicago high school, he was a governor’s music scholar who played five instruments. He was supposed to study music, but he gave it up to defy his father, who was a jazz pianist.

“He always said, ‘You’re gonna regret giving up music. But, I never really gave it up. I just stopped playing the instruments,’” Burke said. He recently started playing music again, learning a new instrument — a Fender bass guitar.

He listens to UK soul music, such as Incognito. He also listens to a lot of jazz artists.

“I try to find artists who are taking the genre in a new direction — any direction,” he said.

“Whether it’s Kamasi Washington, Tom Misch, Radiohead, or Thom Yorke as a solo artist, they take the genre in a new direction. They are doing something outside the realm of traditional music. That’s what attracts me to an artist, more than the genre.”

Burke is married, has four children, and lives in Duluth, Georgia. He has a daughter who works at Tech’s library and a daughter who is a first-year student at Tech.

**FELLOWS, from page 1**

of the Diversity and Inclusion Fellows Program. “When we conceived of this program, the hope was to change the culture on campus by seedling a number of different projects. And it is really exciting to see this actually happening. I particularly appreciate the energy and passion that the Diversity and Inclusion Fellows bring to this program.”

With support from Institute Diversity, the Diversity and Inclusion Fellows Program was created in 2017 to bring together faculty, staff, and students who individually and collectively advance their research, teaching objectives while improving inclusivity on campus.

2018 Diversity Fellows’ topics included conflict resolution skills training for graduate students in science, mentoring and support for African-American female students matriculating through Tech, a summit-style event to discuss issues related to the inclusion of people with disabilities at Tech, and a workshop specifically geared toward undergrads on run makerspaces that expose students to best practices in developing a diverse and inclusive atmosphere.

“It is very exciting to witness the creative ways that our fellows are using their own experience and expertise to foster diversity and inclusivity at Georgia Tech,” said Beril Toktay, ADVANCE Professor in the Scheller College of Business, Brady Family Chair and faculty director of the Ray C. Anderson Center for Sustainable Business, and co-director of the Diversity and Inclusion Fellows Program. “It is particularly gratifying to see how interest in the program has grown, the wealth of ideas and projects that are being proposed, and the effectiveness of the execution.”

The third cohort of faculty, staff, and students was recently selected for the 2019 Diversity and Inclusion Fellows Program. To learn more about the program, visit diversity.gatech.edu/DIFellowsProgram.

Emily Weigel (left), academic professional in the School of Biological Sciences, talks with attendees about her work at the Diversity and Inclusion Fellows Program Poster Expo on Nov. 13.

**HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

**EVENTS**

**WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING**

Nov. 28
Serve-Learn-Sustain hosts a Teaching Toolkit Workshop on Climate Change, Health, and Equity from 10:45 to 11:45 a.m. in the Clough Lounge (Room 205, Clough Commons).

serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu

**Dec. 4**
Human Resources hosts a Healthy Cooking Demo from noon to 1 p.m. in Room 343, Student Center. RSVP at: hr.gatech.edu/bewell

Dec. 12
The Resilience Employee Resource Group hosts a session on Building Resilience through the Holiday Season, from noon to 1 p.m. in Room 319, Student Center.

srli.gatech.edu

**MISCELLANEOUS**

Dec. 2
Women’s Basketball hosts Georgia State at 2 p.m. at McCamish Pavilion.

ramblinwreck.com

Dec. 3–4
Final Instructional Class Days take place for the fall semester.

Dec. 5
Serve-Learn-Sustain hosts a faculty/partner showcase and meet and greet from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Clough Lounge (Room 2050), second floor, Clough Commons.

serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu

Dec. 6
The PROE Employee Resource Group hosts its winter social and service project from 4 to 5 p.m. in the Piedmont Room, Student Center.

lgbtqia.gatech.edu

Dec. 5
Women’s Basketball hosts Alabama State at 7 p.m. at McCamish Pavilion.

ramblinwreck.com

Dec. 6, 11
Reading period will take place for the fall semester, with no exams being administered from 8 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Dec. 6–13
Final exams take place for the fall semester.

For a more comprehensive listing of events, or to add your own, visit calendar.gatech.edu.
The Student Competition Center is the starting line for seven student engineering competition teams. Located in a 17,000-square-foot space on 14th Street near Hemphill, the center is designed to foster innovation among hundreds of students who design, build, and compete using a variety of vehicles or robotic or autonomous systems. In addition to having a separate workspace for each team, the center is equipped with extensive machining resources in its Common Machining Area.

See the full gallery at c.gatech.edu/compcenter.