

Celebrating the Women From GeorgiaTech

Community Engagement
Design Team Summary

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- May 1, 2022 -

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	Date	Stakeholder
Leadership		
	3/15/22	Leslie Sharp Dean of Libraries
	3/24/22	Luoluo Hong VP for Student Engagement & Well-being
	4/04/22	Ellen Bassett Dean of Design
	4/06/22	Kim Harrington Chief of Staff and Associate Vice President for Special Initiatives
	4/06/22	Maria Cimilluca VP of Infrastructure & Sustainability
	4/15/22	Kaye Husbands Feeling Dean of the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts
Faculty/Staff		
	4/14/22	Carol Colatrella Co-Director, GT Center for the Study of Women, Science, and Technology
	4/14/22	Laura Pusateri Outgoing leader of the GT Women's Employee Resource Group
	4/15/22	Colleen Riggle Associate Dean of Students
	4/15/22	Jeanne Balsam Retired-former secretary of the Faculty
	4/15/22	Melanie J DeMaeyer Principal Researcher in GTRI (20 years)
	4/15/22	Stephanie Ray Director of Women's Resource Center
	4/15/22	Mary McDonald Associate Dean of Students/Director of Diversity Programs
	4/15/22	Pinar Keskinocak Homer C. Rice Chair in Sports and Society
	4/18/22	Tegra Myanna Chair, Professor, Director of the Center for Health and Humanitarian Systems
	4/20/22	Terry Blum Director, LGBTQIA Resource Center
	4/26/22	Kim Cobb Chair in Entrepreneurship, ADVANCE Professor, Faculty Director
	4/28/22	Martha Grover Institute for Leadership and Social Impact
		ADVANCE Professor, Ga. Power Faculty Scholar
		Professor and Associate Chair for Graduate Studies in the
		School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, ADVANCE professor
Outstanding		Mary Frank Fox Co-Director, GT Center for the Study of Women, Science, and Technology
		Mary Lynn Realff Co-Director, GT Center for the Study of Women, Science, and Technology
		Christine Valle Director of the Women in Engineering (WIE) Program
		Principal Academic Professional
		Kim Toatley Deputy Director for Finance and Research Administration at GTRI
		Pearl Alexander Institute Diversity, Executive Director, Staff Diversity, Inclusion, and Engagement
		Kim Toatley Deputy Director for Finance and Research Administration at GTRI
		Bonnie Ferr Vice Provost
		Jennifer Haster Professor in ECE (offer advice on transgenered perspective)
Students		
	4/5/22	Ajanta Choudhury SGA - Executive Vice President - BS, Bio
	4/5/22	Allison K Vermaak SGA - Joint Vice President of Sustainability & Infrastructure
	4/5/22	Ash Elizabeth King Intern with Jennifer Rogers in Alumni, Architecture/Planning Undergrad
	4/5/22	Rebecca A Hammond Student leading the Divine Nine NPHC plaza project - BS Chem, Biomol. Eng.
	4/12/22	Lisa R Medford Student led the Klaus Stairs - BS, Public Policy
	4/12/22	Michelle M Ramirez Grad Student in Digital Media
	4/12/22	Alexandra T Riggs Grad Student Digital Media, recommended by Anne Sullivan
	4/20/22	Abby Chambliss ISYE Undergraduate, Masters Student in Health Systems
	4/22/22	Joan Saheb ISYE Undergraduate, Masters in Supply Chain, International Student
Alumnae		
	11/23/21	Joy Jordan Kimberly Clark, First Balck Woman Presidential Scholar - GT BS, Chem.,
	11/24/21	Betsy Bulat Turner Lawyer, GT International Affairs Undergraduate, (Future Alumni Association Chair)
	11/29/21	Annie Anton Professor and former Chair, School of Interactive Computing
	11/29/21	Jocelyn Stargel GT Undergraduate, Graduate and PhD.
	11/29/21	Anu Parvatiyar GT Past chair of Alumni Association, Industrial Engineer, WAN
	11/30/21	Janice Wittshiebe Biomedical Engineering, GT SGA President
		Architect, GT Alumni Association, GT Advisory Board

Process

After the Design Development presentation in early March 2022, the team was asked to present their process and proposal to a broader Tech community. Over the past two months, the design team conducted small group and one-on-one presentations/interviews with 18 faculty/staff members and 10 students. Seven alumni were interviewed prior to starting the design process. The list of selected faculty/staff and students was generated by the institute, while the list of Alumnae was suggested by the project's Donor (Andrea Laliberte). Notes from interviews (and recordings when available) are provided as links at the end of this document. Emergent interview themes were developed by grouping all comments under common headings in an interactive Miro board ([link here](#)). A summary of these are presented in this document.

As means of a summary this document also includes: oppositions within the comments (Dialectical Pairing), Group Perspectives, Engagement Summary, Expanded Design Criteria Options, Current Design Proposal Strengths and Shortcomings, Ways Forward, and a collection of Reactive Narratives (visual sketches to be presented next week).

It is recommended this summary be distributed to all those who participated in this process.

Common Themes

Broadening and Contextualizing Accomplishments:

Celebrate individual women with an expansive definition of impact.

To date, the project has been focused on celebrating the accomplishments, impact and contributions of **Women from Georgia Tech**. The majority of the interviewees supported the project's goal of celebrating alumni ('It is fine to recognize Alumni', 'It is important to recognize woman', 'We shouldn't feel bad about celebrating people who are incredible', 'It is important to honor women Alumni – it was hard for them – look what they accomplished!') but had concerns around inclusion, definition/criteria, context, and relatability. In most interviews there was a request to broaden the definition of accomplishment. There were requests to consider intersectionality (see below), to use 'sector' instead of 'industry' (to include academia, research, and those outside of the private sector), and to consider women from service (those who focus more on mentorship or advising) in addition to individualist distinction. 'Include people who are not newsworthy or featured in a magazine', 'Include success across many different fields', 'Include acts of generosity from the everyday', 'Include people who are not famous but had an impact on students', 'Include mothers', 'Can motherhood or the first member of a family to graduate be a success – how can success be expanded to each person's definition?', 'Include Ms. Ruthie who served as a dining service woman for over 40 years', 'For some women graduating from Tech is a huge accomplishment for both themselves and their families' etc.

Deeper discussions developed around finding the threads between Tech faculty/staff contributions and alumni's success, and to understand these successes broader impact on equity and opportunity. How is achievement a form of civic agitation or what is the role of precedent-setting? What does overcoming odds have to do with inspiring forthcoming generations? How does one woman's success bolster all women's success? 'It is critical to show the relationship of current actions to the future generations and the opportunities we have thanks to previous actors', 'What is opportunity – is that what real success looks like?'.

There were also numerous requests for contextuality – how could we help frame success to help it feel more achievable or relatable – what were the socio-political forces at play, what makes a specific accomplishment significant. Students were more interested in how someone came into their dreams than the dream or title itself – was it hard work, perseverance, a helping hand? What did alumni do in moments of fear or adversity – how are they relatable? Putting an accomplishment on a pedestal (without context, without circumstance) makes it feel further out of reach and less inspiring. 'We don't want to put women on a pedestal – it may tell a false story of success or set others up for failure'.

Similarly, there were requests to ensure that these successes did not overshadow or ignore the barriers still at work. 'Don't paint too rosy a picture', 'There is still a lot of work to be done', 'Just adding women doesn't fix a system', 'It shouldn't be add women and stir'.

Lastly, there were questions about selection and inclusion. As discussed in other themes – it is critical that the collection and selection process be open, transparent, self-critical, unbiased and adjustable (see Equity below), and to establish both the physical and digital manifestation without limits on who or when women can be included or added.

Community:

Demonstrate the interconnectivity of women and the strength of a collective/community.

'Celebrate the great women but also celebrate the groups and movements', 'Can we express the collaboration between women?', 'Could this project help people feel a sense of community and belonging?', 'Can this highlight solidarity, working together or interconnectivity?', 'Celebrate sisterhood'. There were many requests to acknowledge the role of community both on campus and beyond. There was a desire to highlight the important existing resources and communities at Tech – 'there are over 30-40 student chartered women's organizations'. Faculty and staff also wanted the project to help students appreciate the importance of building or finding a community, 'how do we help people understand that their access and identity comes from their group - who will you choose to work with? Who will you affiliate with? What projects will you choose to do? We construct our lives and careers by choosing our groups.' There was a general desire to look beyond individual success, to understand its interdependencies and the strength and opportunity within collectivity.

Ensuring Equity:

Select inclusive content. Acknowledge the project flaws.

The project must be equitable. Forms of equity requests came in the following themes: privilege, intersectionality, diverse representation, the undocumented, accessibility, and placement. Immediate questions from interviews were, 'will this project be inclusive' – 'will this project be all white women'. Early Tech graduates were often white – they were admitted before African Americans, and often came from elevated socio-economic backgrounds (privilege). There is concern from all groups that the metrics of success (alumnae selected for celebration) will be biased towards women with exceptional privilege. If intersectionality (the compounded forces of race/class/gender discrimination) are at play for sectors of students and/or alumni – how will the project be inclusive to their unique condition? Similarly, there were requests to include women from different races, gender-orientation (non-gendered or transgendered individuals), and women with disabilities. There were also requests to find a way to acknowledge the gaps of history or documentation – how can the work acknowledge those missed or marginalized in Tech's historical accounts. 'How can the project be self-critical?'. There were technical questions about which alumni would be placed in which chair setting in space – would there be priority? A foreground, a background? Additionally there were requests to consider those in wheelchairs and with other sight or visual disabilities both in terms of engagement and representation.

Everlasting:

Be overtly flexible – construct the physical and digital to be infinitely expandable or updateable.

'Keep the project Open', 'Don't be stale - don't be static', 'Don't open and be out of date', 'Don't limit', 'Monuments are out of date', 'Etching is too permanent', 'Make it timeless, think about longevity and relevance'. There is a general concern to keep the project up-to-date and relevant. Interviewees were concerned about the fixed nature of the seats - having a fixed number makes it feel inherently limited, 'like we could hit a glass ceiling'. The project shouldn't look like it could run out of space. There were questions about how it could be updated or evolve over time. Could it refresh every 5 years, could/should it include **every** alumnae or faculty/staff in some form? Should the content be all digital? The community was excited about the website and the digital table. There seemed to be a general desire to have more overt flexibility in the physical manifestation. The project must be expandable both digitally and physically. It will be important to design both the flexibility and the stewardship.

Student Engagement?

Include an interface for immediate student engagement.

'Encourage interaction', 'How can this get students to learn more', 'Encourage interaction between current and past students', 'Will the project support events', 'Can people give to this?', 'Will there be interpretive signage on either side', 'Can students thank a teacher, nominate a faculty or themselves?', 'Can students take photos of it and post to social media?', 'Can this connect students to actual Alumnae.' There is a general request to make the project relevant and engaging to students on campus. It will be important to establish clear touch points that encourage interactivity and curiosity. There seems to be a general wish for people to be able to add content or engage immediately.

The challenge of Time - Generational Difference, the role of Tech, forms of Mentorship

Acknowledge the heritage/eras of women from Tech.

The challenges students face today are different from the challenges the first women faced in the 1950's or the representation experienced even 20 years ago. How does the project stay relevant while also honoring the work done (and the adversity faced) in the past. Alumni wanted students to know what it was like when they were at Tech. 'Nothing was handed to us – we worked hard to succeed in every way.' Additionally, responses to 'the seat' (whether in the classroom or as a 'seat at a table') resonated with some interviewees and not with others. Some were focused on institutional change and others embraced the metaphors of equity within established structures. There is a desire to remember where we came from and a tension between celebrating the overcoming of obstacles while still pushing for additional correction or alteration.

Demonstrate Tech's operative role in creating the future.

There were discussions around the role of Tech and the placement of the project on campus. 'What happens after Tech because of Tech? How is Tech a springboard'. There was a desire to see the connection between alumni and the institute – to highlight Tech's role in creating the Alumni. Faculty/Staff and Alumni discussed the challenges of Tech's rigor – the comments were both positive and negative. Faculty/Staff and students were keenly aware of how some students 'made it through Tech - despite Tech' while Alumni saw the difficulties as a badge of honor, or as an experience that prepared them for their careers and made other challenges easier. In general there is an important need to highlight Tech's role as an operative conduit – as a place that influences the future and provides pivotal moments of coming together.

Be a mentor.

Lastly, there were many discussions around mentorship - around both the everyday mentor and the sought-out role model. There was emphasis on the approachability and engagement of a mentor - their **care** for students beyond their studies. 'What is a woman's beacon? What does it mean to care for someone - not mentorship like putting a statue on a pedestal, a mentor should meet you where you are, stand with you, be relatable and make connections'. Conversely, there was emphasis on the known need for young people to look for mentors above them - to see women in positions of power or agency. Tenured faculty especially spoke of becoming aware of their role (outside of their official positions) of being someone others could look up to and/or as someone with the agency to lift others to follow in their footsteps

Tech's Inequities and the South

Express the numerical representation of women (faculty, staff, leadership and students) on campus.

Emergent in the Faculty/Staff interviews was the wish to highlight the ongoing challenges faced within the institute and the South more broadly. 'Women in STEM leadership is still underrepresented and difficult', 'There are still only 20% tenured faculty on campus', 'Don't let this be Tech's way of looking good', 'There is a culture at Tech that does not accept criticism', 'The unique thing about women from Tech specifically, is that they were admitted quite late compared to institutions, also women in technology is also quite new – the other unique thing about women at Tech is the fact that they are in Southern society, their strides needed to be careful'. While celebrating alumni was supported, there is a desire to ensure this project doesn't overshadow the inequities at the Institute. 'How can we embrace this opportunity?'. How can this project do more?

Narrative - Tone and Inspiration

Express pride – be inspiring.

'The project needs to tell a story on its own', 'What is the FEELING we want people to leave with?', 'It is most important to inspire the students', 'The project should include the tension - the difficulty and the perpetual challenges', 'Women engineers on campus are proud', 'My experience at Tech was very positive - but my Grandmother's experience was horrible', 'Embolden', 'Dream Big', 'You learn by not exceeding - you learn more through failure', 'The sky's the limit', 'There is no progress unless you are willing to criticize', 'The only thing that will change their mind is time and women being successful', 'It is important to believe in yourself so you can overcome how you are treated', 'If someone says you cannot do something - don't believe it', 'Women learn to navigate barriers'. The mix of emotions and narratives around the project are diverse and complex. It will be important to incorporate their nuances.

There was a general support for the use of quotes or stories. Most wanted the project to evoke a sense of pride or inspiration. Some spoke of 'sisterhood'. The project should highlight both the challenges and struggles of Tech's female community, to tell a moving/impactful story of celebration.

Binary

There were some questions about how to address the limitations of the binary. 'When looking at men/women - we are often asked why look at women only. Be ready to answer this question.... Is gender binary a contemporary question?', 'Is it white-men and then everyone else?'.

Literalism, Form and Metaphor

Represent expansiveness, change, difference and flexibility.

Comments about the project's form and shape are difficult to summarize. There was a generally positive reaction to the site and scale. 'The site seems great', 'I'm happy with location, scale, and passion behind the project', 'I like the idea of something big'. The group appreciated celebrating more than one person. Many were attracted to something that was fluid, flexible, moving. There were comments on the mobius's strips appropriateness and use in feminist theory. Comments about material were looking for something distinctive and ephemeral, 'There is so much metal on campus', 'can it be made of mirrors or tinted glass?', 'Consider using water'. There were very strong reactions (both positive and negative) to the 'seats' and the 'table' – literal and metaphorical interpretations were extremely varied. There were requests for something that was less discrete, and for objects within the work to be less similar.

Simplicity and Clarity - Acknowledgment of Project limitations

Be clear, be elegant - like a good mathematical proof.

Towards the end of most interviews, there was often a comment asking for simplicity, elegance and clarity. There was a general understanding that the project couldn't do everything and that if it tried to do too much it may lose its power or grace. 'Consider simplicity', 'It should be simple, clean, compelling and inclusive', 'Sometimes projects are doing too much – it is better if there is a clear story and that it is doing one thing', 'It should be clearly understood, Relatable, not pedestrian - you don't want it to be obtuse, you want everyone to understand it'.

'This project doesn't need to take on all challenges of what it means to be a women', 'We need to define what it is and what it is not', 'It would be hard to select people for this project', 'It cannot do everything but cannot be a token', 'Can it recognize its flaws?', 'There isn't really anything that unites us', 'How can this project be both/and not either/or'.

The community understands the project's limitations. It wants it to do a lot while also wanting something clear and simple.

Dialectical Pairings

Through the process a few tensions emerged – requests that were relatable opposites:

Individual vs Community: There is a desire to celebrate both the individual and the collective and collaboration.

Humility/Service/Self-Sacrifice vs Achievement: There is a tension between honoring those who have accomplished something unique or outstanding while also celebrating the individuals that work for change or mentor and support without a spotlight. The two are intertwined in generating future opportunities.

Overcoming vs Correcting: There were requests to address the structures that operate for and against women, as in, 'Don't sit at the table, dismantle it,' while others spoke of navigating barriers and finding ways through adverse systems. What makes someone resilient and what helps them fulfill their potential despite the obstacles? Are we stronger because it was hard or is this a way of excusing inequity? Should we make it easier so more can succeed or should we prepare students for the inevitable challenges ahead. Likely both.

Literal, Metaphorical vs Abstract: People want the project to be clear yet narrowly judge and project into their first reading of the forms. There is the concern that if we celebrate individuals we are leaving other people out. If we use a metaphor it may become out of date. Tables are symbolic and exclusionary forms of power yet tables are where we come together as humans. Yellow chairs feel powerful and strong .. yellow chairs look like blond women. There seems to be an inherent risk with using any literal form, yet there is a desire to make the project clear, relatable and understood. Can the project be both an abstraction of an idea or image while also maintaining its approachability?

Simple vs Complex: There is a desire to synthesize the story into something simple and legible but the story is broad and complex.

Group Perspectives

Each group (Faculty/Staff, Students, Alumnae) has its own perspective and agenda – there are shared desires between the groups but each group had larger predilections:

Faculty/Staff see this project as an opportunity to celebrate the role of campus mentorship and organizations. They would like to celebrate the institute's role in the development of alumni. They are also wary of this project overshadowing the institute's current inequities – especially the representation of tenured women faculty/staff and women in leadership. If this project is about mentorship, achievement, and service, this project should also honor the work of the women (librarians, professors, advisors, administrators, dining hall managers) who have contributed to the ability for students to move through the institute. It should also highlight the ongoing work necessary to bring Tech's faculty/staff representation into balance. The faculty/staff care most about the representation of the campus itself and the role it plays in the alumni's trajectory. One quote repeated was: 'Student's get through Tech – despite Tech'; The faculty/staff, through their work with students, have felt the barriers within the institute and are continuing their support of marginalized communities. Additionally, the faculty/staff also had a keen interest in ensuring this project has a strong student-engagement interactive component to help educate and connect students to the campus and beyond. Could this project connect students to actual alumni, capture their voices, let them nominate impactful faculty/staff or inform them of the different communities on campus?

Students have a keen interest in contemporaneity. The majority were primarily concerned with today's race and gender representation. They want the project to be flexible and adaptable without a limit on who can be included. Some are looking for themselves in the work or assume that their particular race or gender orientation will not be included. If they are not represented in the work they feel the project is another form of discriminational and exclusion – both physically and symbolically. Others feel that **any** woman's success is inspiring – they recognize that a 'woman achieving' is good for all women and do not need to see direct racial or ethnic reflections of themselves. Some students find quotes from the 70's 'dated', 'sitting' too restrained, 'a seat at the table' 'archaic'. Others find the chairs inspiring and fitting to the collegiate setting. In general, the students are attracted most to something updateable - digital - infinite and broad. They are also looking for relatability. There were some requests to see actual women's images, 'highlight pictures or videos'.

Alumnae are proud of their accomplishments and want to impart their lessons to the women coming after them. Their journey was not easy. It was difficult but they overcame their challenges and defeated adversity. They want students to understand that barriers they may see, feel or perceive are 'false'. They spoke of imagination, creativity, going beyond what they could have expected for themselves - 'don't give up on opportunities', 'be bold', 'the sky's the limit', 'be unafraid', 'be generous', 'remember there are people after you'. They understood that failure is an important part of the journey. They spoke of resilience, of seeing things differently from the other side, of the futility in being embarrassed by a flaw. They want students to understand that it was different in their time and that things have changed. They have also learned that mentors or role models don't need to look like you, to feel comfortable in evaluating someone who may look different or have a different background. They felt that Tech gave them the tools they needed to succeed – that the foundational knowledge of Tech and the difficulty of getting through it – made them stronger and more capable. Lastly, they recognized that their success was thanks to others – that their opportunities came not from people with fame – but from those (men and women) who took the time to get to know them, encourage them and who open pathways forward during and after Tech. Lastly, they are learning as they move into stable positions of power the importance of lifting-up others – of their role as role-models and instigators of change.

Engagement Summary

The outreach process was enlightening. The women's story is complex and all communities of women on campus desire representation. The triad of student-faculty/staff-alumni and past-present-future feels important in depicting a deeper narrative. Equitable collection and representation, flexibility, criticality and celebration/inspiration are criteria necessary for satisfying the larger community.

One clarifying lens for the feedback is to contextualize it with the broader subject of diversity, equity and inclusion. The varied opinions, when viewed as a whole, begin to assemble the menu of modes for overcoming adversity. There seemed to be a desire to see the project do more than highlight an individual's achievement because role-model-success/impact is only one piece of the puzzle. Inclusivity can be celebrated with precedent setters, mentors and aspirations (as the current project ambitions set out) – but community, preparedness, re-definitions of success, contextuality, and changes in fundamental structures are also critical to inclusion (or a person's success). Are we celebrating women? Or are we celebrating the inclusion of women? If this project is about celebrating (the inclusion of) women as a way of inspiring future generations, its resonance will be broader if it can tell a deeper story.

Below is a summary of the feedback reformatted as possible design objectives.

Design Objectives

Celebrate women with an expansive definition of impact.

Demonstrate the interconnectivity of women and the strength of a collective/community.

Select and include diverse content and perspectives of women at and from Tech.

Acknowledge the project flaw – i.e. gaps of women who are not in archival or who may be unintentionally excluded.

Be overtly flexible (changing) – construct the physical and digital to be infinitely expandable or updateable.

Include an interface for immediate student engagement.

Acknowledge the heritage/eras of women from Tech.

Demonstrate Tech's operative role in creating the future.

Be a mentor.

Express the numerical representation of women (faculty/staff, staff, leadership and students) on campus.

Express pride – be inspiring.

Represent expansiveness, change, difference and flexibility as ways of embracing a plurality of feminisms and polyvocality.

Be clear, be elegant - like a good mathematical proof.

Create a destination.

Have a bold, commanding physical presence.

Accommodate deep layers of story, holding space for the struggles of women at Tech as well as celebrating successes.

Communicate with 'Tech' - Use innovative technology

- Create opportunities -

Current Design Proposal Strengths and Shortcomings

+ Celebrating multiple women	- Physical is too discrete (limited in number)
+ Good Site	- Physical is too uniform (in color and shape)
+ Bold and Large	- Metaphor isn't universal, timeless
+ Includes interactive digital component	- Project isn't yet demonstrating inclusive selection/curation
	- Too celebratory - not enough context or criticality
	- Isn't overtly flexible

Interview Links

INTERVIEW	LINK
Sharp	Interview Notes
Hong	Interview Notes
Bassett	Interview Notes
Harrington	Interview Notes
Cimilluca	Interview Notes
Husbands Feeling	Interview Notes
Colatrella + Pusateri	Interview Notes / Recording
Riggle + Balsam + DeMaeyer + Ray	Interview Notes / Recording
McDonald	Interview Notes / Recording
Keskinocak	Interview Notes
Myanna	Interview Notes
Blum	Interview Notes
Cobb	Interview Notes
Grover	Interview Notes
Vermaak + Medford + Hammond + Choudhury + King	Interview Notes / Recording
Riggs + Ramirez	Interview Notes / Recording
Chambless	Interview Notes / Recording
Saheb	Interview Notes
Jordan + Turner + Anton + Stargel + Parvatiyar - Wittsiebe	Interview Notes Jordan - Recording Turner - Recording Anton - Recording Stargel - Recording Parvatiyar - Recording Wittsiebe - Recording