

OUR VIEWS | Consensus Opinion

## Our Perpetual Civic Duty

*Political involvement does not end on election day*

In the political fervor of the days leading up to Nov. 6, the term “civic duty” took its place in the transient spotlight of the public consciousness. The phrase is universally understood as a reference to voting; most of America’s civic engagement occurs in an election booth once every few years. While self-righteous flaunting of stickers and Facebook profile frames seems to represent a population heavily involved in the political process, the current excitement around government will fade before new representatives even take their seats.

The gears of our political process are always turning, however. Many Americans act as though casting a vote is the most they can do to affect the course of their community and the nation as a whole. In a healthy democracy, however, the general public takes on role that is arguably more important than the vote they cast in November.

First, they can take action on the issues that drove them to cast a ballot in the first place. Voters ideally choose a candidate based on a variety of issues, and those issues will persist despite the election. If someone wants to see change, there are almost certainly organizations dedicated to serving their interests that are in dire need of monetary donations and volunteers.

There is definitely a big difference between casting a vote and spending time or money on activism. Fortunately, there is an even larger middle ground that is accessible to everyone.

Instead of simply voting, civic duty should refer to informed voting. A politically engaged populace follows the actions of their representatives and ensures that they live up to their title. Contacting representatives leads to a response at the least and a tangible change at most. Skeptics may argue that reps are more beholden to special interests than their constituents, but the razor-thin margins of the most recent elections have emphasized the fact that every vote counts. If enough people express a desire for action, change can happen at any time. Voices are heard far beyond election day if people are passionate enough to speak up.

Even though the political landscape may not directly affect everyone, it still affects their classmates, colleagues and neighbors. They may not give out stickers for reading up on the latest bill to go through Congress, but maintaining a working knowledge of politics is the best way for an individual to support a healthy democracy. To be apathetic after election day is to shirk your civic duty.

*The Consensus Opinion reflects the majority opinion of the Editorial Board of the Technique, but not necessarily the opinions of individual editors.*

## Charity often only serves to benefit ego

We all want to feel like we’re good people who are helping to make the world a better place, but when it comes to poverty most of us actually have no idea what is good, helpful or effective. Like with most problems, we are driven to action instead of understanding, but with things like hunger, malaria and clean water, the difference between good and bad solutions can literally be life and death. In reality, the average American knows very little about the life and struggles of poor people in Africa, Southeast Asia or even down the street.

We want to help, but we are notoriously bad at distinguishing the difference between helpful and harmful. When companies like Toms offer a one-for-one model, it seems like a win-win. We get a pair of shoes, and someone in need gets one too. We think that if we buy their products our financial contribution is making the world a better place. It’s not that these companies are evil or malicious. They are just more focused on making a profit than actually helping poor people. They’re businesses, not charities. However, the one-to-one model is not only ineffective, it takes advantage of its customers and promotes lies about charity, doing more harm than good to the people it’s trying to help.

Companies with a one-to-one model sell you a narrative about countries with extreme poverty that is often grossly exaggerated and false. It says that the only way

to help get kids out of poverty is to drop off a ton of shoes or school uniforms. It does nothing to create a self-sustaining community. These models do more to bolster our ego and little to actually alleviate the issues in these communities. They tell us that we know best when it comes to charity and that poor people are just waiting around for us to drop off shoes as though there are no shoemakers in Africa or Latin America. In actuality, flooding the community with free products can cripple the local economy, driving up unemployment for the people who make those products.

The one-to-one model does not seek to understand the actual problems plaguing people in poverty stricken regions and often disregards the real problems altogether. The reason poverty is such a hard issue is because things like culture, political unrest, gender roles, environmental issues and inefficient institutions underlie almost every issue. On the surface giving products like school uniforms to girls seems like a good idea, but in reality it can be more harmful than helpful.

Giving every girl a new school uniform doesn’t begin to address the root problems. Girls may receive school uniforms, but they are more than likely not attending school because they are expected to perform housework, get jobs in order to support the rest of the family or get married extremely

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### SURPRISE RETIREMENT BY LAUREN DOUGLAS



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Got something to say? Then let your voice be heard with the *Technique*. Sliver at Nique.net, tweet us @the\_nique or check us out on Facebook at facebook.com/thenique. We want to hear your opinion and want to make it known to all of campus.

We also welcome your letters in response to *Technique* content as well as topics relevant to campus. We will print letters on a timely and space-available basis.

Each week we look for letters that

are responses to or commentaries on content found within the pages of the *Technique*. Along with these letters, we are open to receiving letters that focus on relevant issues that currently affect Georgia Tech as a university, including its campus and student body.

When submitting letters we ask that you include your full name, year (1st, 2nd, etc.) and major. We ask that letters be thought provoking, well written and in good taste. We reserve the right to both reject or edit letters for length and style.

For questions, comments or concern, contact the Opinions Editor at **opinions@nique.net**.



# Lack of breadth in education comes at cost

It goes without saying that college years are key for a young adult's educational development. Students undergo a crash course in what they will be doing for the rest of their lives and learn an immense amount of information in the four-plus years they spend on campus. What students, myself included, often forget is that their education doesn't have to begin and end with the classroom.

Simply due to the nature of the American education system and economic system, college students spend the vast majority of their time focusing intensively on one topic. It's not a bad thing; this allows them to become experts in their chosen craft and to know more than most others about a certain topic. But it leaves other topics by the wayside. At an extremely competitive school like Tech, it contributes to a tunnel vision effect that obscures everything except the center.

Colleges have tried to solve this problem by requiring core classes in various areas. Engineers have to take a humanities class. Liberal arts students have to take a computer science class. But this does not go far enough to ensure that students, in their critical years of development into adulthood, are becoming well-rounded people.

It is up to the student to augment his or her own education. It



"There are myriad resources, as long as students open their eyes and look for them."

**POLLY OUELLETTE**  
LIFE EDITOR

is up to the student, the lifelong learner, to seek out new experiences, perspectives and knowledge.

Luckily, schools like Tech recognize that students need and want more than they are offered in their required classes. There are myriad resources, as long as students open their eyes and look for them. Student organizations, performances at the First Center, cultural celebrations, and many other opportunities are offered to students, just waiting to be taken.

Some of the powerful and most memorable educational experiences might not be in class — they'll be at a hackathon that you didn't think you were prepared for, a filmmaking competition that had nothing to do with your major, a dance performance that made you think in a different way.

These are experiences that aren't graded. They can't contribute to your GPA, and you

don't get course credit for them. They are instead opportunities for students to explore the world around them in an educational environment without the pressure of grades. For students afraid to try something new because they are scared of failing, this is a fool-proof method. There is nothing to be lost and so much to be gained.

In addition to gaining a world-class academic education while at Tech, we have the opportunity to get a cultural education. We are in fact obligated to get that cultural education, as it will be just as important when we take our academic skills into the world.

It will help us to have more intelligent conversations, to be empathetic towards those who are different from us, to discover what might interest us and make us tick. It will help us to be happy, productive adults with a passion for lifelong learning.

## HELP

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young, often against their will. It oversimplifies the issue to say that the only thing stopping girls from going to school is that they don't have the right outfit. The money spent manufacturing and shipping school uniforms would be much better spent providing the family with financial resources that are only available if the daughters remain in school.

What most people in these countries need is not more consumer goods but more money to buy consumer goods in order to support their local economy. The issue is that when we think about giving poor people cash, there is no way to know if that money is going towards education and food or booze and brothels. And it's true, as giving away cash would be about as effective as dropping off a ton of shoes — I'm looking at you Drake.

However, there have been studies that show investing in women through micro-financing loans often has a high return for the entire family while also fighting against gender norms. It can have positive social effects, giving women a sense of autonomy and agency over their families and lives and allowing them to be self-sustainable.

If we're going to make an impact, we have to be thoughtful about how we are giving — and to whom — and seek to understand the real issues as well as the real effects of the companies and charities we are supporting by building relationships with the people

on the ground and by supporting grassroots efforts. Not every solution is good for every problem. Ultimately we can make a difference, but we need to be smarter about poverty.

In order to do that, there are a few steps you can take today. First, you can learn about global poverty. There are several books that sum up many of the major causes of poverty, initiatives that have been successful and progress that has been made. "The End of Poverty" by Jeffrey Sachs, an economist and special advisor to the UN, helps to describe the key issues surrounding poverty, and "Half the Sky" by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn — Pulitzer Prize winning journalists — discusses how empowering women can radically change impoverished communities and spur tangible change both economically and socially.

You can also explore different evidence-backed charities on [givewell.org](http://givewell.org) and check the validity ratings of charities on [charitynavigator.org](http://charitynavigator.org).

Finally, you can invest in people-to-people microlending organizations like [globalgiving.org](http://globalgiving.org) or [kiva.org](http://kiva.org) or sponsor a child through groups like Plan International or World Vision.

Sometimes hearing about poverty can make the world feel hopeless, but there are far less people living in extreme poverty today than there were 50 or 100 years ago, and this is because of effective and thoughtful charities that partner with people like us: ordinary people who care.

READ.  
THINK.  
SPEAK.



**NAR**

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# Is Bird the new Uber?

I'm on the fence on whether scooters are a force for good or evil, or even if they should be discussed on those moral terms — but I do believe that scooters are the most disruptive transportation technology to hit the streets of Atlanta since Uber.

Forgetting safety for a second and assessing the matter in terms of helping people traverse a city — dumping scooters and bikes everywhere can work rather well in the right city environments, in my opinion. In summer of 2017, I was in China for nine weeks on a study abroad program, and one of the easiest ways to get around Tianjin or Shanghai was to take advantage of a loophole in older Ofo dockless bike models when paying riders forgot to lock their bikes after their trips.

Find an unlocked Ofo, and you're good to go zipping around the city. Newer models have fixed that issue by automatically locking after a user ends a ride.

So to say the least, after a pleasant experience with dockless transport in China, I was ready to embrace them back at home, even at a cost. But little did I know that it would be scooters, not bikes, that would gain popularity.

When I think scooters, I think back to my childhood and a blue electric Razor Scooter my brother and I used to ride around and around our cul-de-sac. Over a year ago, when I first read about scooters as an actual mode of urban transport, I found the concept amusing.

Regardless of my initial skepticism, it seems apparent that scooters have caught fire, both in popularity, and, in the case of Lime scooters, literally: last week, Lime

posted a blog letting people know the subset of its scooters manufactured by Segway-Ninebot were prone to “battery smoldering, or, in some cases, catching fire.”

So the question remains: are scooters to go the way of segways and hoverboards — relegated to niche populations — or will they take off and become a standard mode of transportation, like Uber? For me, the criterion for “standard mode of transportation” is becoming normal, ubiquitous, verifiable and social to the point that the most regular thing in the world would be to Bird with a couple of your friends to Atlantic Station to watch a movie and Bird back.

At least from a venture capital standpoint, the scooter companies are following trajectories similar to or exceeding the growth of Uber. The two dominant scooter unicorns, Bird and Lime, were founded in 2017 and already have \$2 billion and \$1.1 billion valuations, respectively. This is a pretty rapid pace considering that it took Uber about three years from its initial seed funding in 2010 to reach a \$3.5 billion valuation.

Similar to Uber, Bird and Lime also both offer a monetization method for the average person out there in the form of chargers that collect bicycles and recharge them overnight for instant money in the morning, a scheme that doubles as a method of managing scooter locations.

On a less pleasant note, like Uber, the scooter companies have

been notorious for not communicating with local officials when introducing their vehicles to a region. Across the country, there have been complaints about scooters blocking sidewalks and cars, and riders not wearing helmets.

None of this rubs city officials the right way. In June, San Francisco banned all scooter companies after Lime and other companies ignored a cease-and-desist letter. When it came around to the decision-making time of which companies they would allow back on the streets, San Francisco city officials gave the cold shoulder to Bird and Lime and chose two smaller startups instead.

I think that here in Atlanta, we ought to give scooters a chance, while optimizing safety — an approach that I think that we at Tech have begun to manage well, with the advent of the Georgia Tech Police Department ticketing riders who violate traffic rules.

Relay Bikes, Atlanta's home-brewed docked bike solution that launched in June 2016, had almost 11,000 rides in July 2018, a figure that sounds impressive until you calculate the amount of daily rides: a tad over 350 rides a day on average.

Although I lack usage statistics, just from watching popularity on campus alone, I am willing to bet that daily scooter rides across Atlanta are already well exceeding that threshold. Whether for better or worse, scooters are already a'changing the times.

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**JONATHAN JEFFREY**  
NEWS EDITOR



## Prime Time

The Jackets will play their first prime time game of the season against the University of Miami Hurricanes under the lights of Bobby Dodd at 7 p.m. this Saturday, the 10th. The game serves as Tech's annual whiteout, and a limited number of Calvin Johnson bobbleheads will be given out on a first-come first-serve basis to fans willing to show up a few hours early.



## A Day of Firsts

The recent midterm elections gave us several political firsts. Colorado elected the nation's first gay governor, Jared Polis, while Sharice Davids and Deb Haaland became the first Native American women elected to Congress. We also elected the first two Muslim women to Congress, contributing to a record-breaking number of women elected.

## Fly Smellta

A man was forced to sit in dog feces on a Delta flight this week after the flight crew dismissed his complaints. An ailing service animal was the apparent cause of the incident, though it seems strange that the mess wasn't cleaned before the next flight boarded. The man was offered compensation for the ordeal, but the damage to his pride is already done.

2019  
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