

# Graduate Student Advisory Board (GSAB) Executive Summary

GSAB Board of Representatives

January 24, 2025

## 1 Preamble

This executive summary highlights the most significant insights, concerns, and proposals from the GSAB over the past calendar year. It serves as a comprehensive yet concise document designed to inform the Division Chair of the key issues and opportunities identified by graduate students within the Division of Engineering and Applied Science (EAS) at Caltech.

By distilling our primary findings, recommendations, and requests, this summary aims to support informed decision-making and collaborative action. It reflects the collective voice of the graduate student body, guided by our commitment to enhancing academic experiences, fostering inclusivity, and advancing the overall well-being of our peers.

## 2 Activities

### 2.1 Past Initiatives

Since its establishment in April 2024, GSAB has actively engaged with students and administrators to enhance the graduate experience. Key activities included:

- Sending out a survey to the EAS student body to gather information on the student experience in EAS.
- Hosting introductory Coffee Hours for GSAB department representatives to meet with students and solicit feedback and ideas.
- Organizing a Cold Brew Coffee Hour in collaboration with Womxn in EAS to welcome the 2024 academic year.
- Meeting with the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies to address student/advisor conflict resolution and with the Medical Director and Counseling Services Director to discuss common student health concerns, resources, and opportunities for collaboration.

### 2.2 Proposed Future Initiatives

A common piece of feedback received by the GSAB is that students lack opportunities to socialize with peers and learn about research outside their department. This inhibits the interdisciplinary culture that Caltech seeks to foster. To address this issue, the GSAB recommends the creation of new initiatives to strengthen division-wide culture and promote opportunities for social connection, professional networking, and inter-departmental research collaborations. Key proposals for the future include:

#### Initiatives Promoting Student-Student Interactions:

- **EAS Field Day Event:** GSAB proposes to host an annual EAS Field Day event, designed to promote social unity and camaraderie among graduate students. This event could feature a range of activities, including outdoor team-building exercises, athletic competitions, and social gatherings via a potluck/picnic style dinner, to strengthen relationships within the division and encourage relationships across different departments.

- **‘EASKEG’ Event:** We also envision hosting a series of KEG socials that bring together EAS graduate students as well as professors to socialize via free beer! This event would serve as an opportunity for students, staff, and faculty to engage with each other in a more laid-back manner, fostering more personal connections that will benefit the research environment in the long run. Overall, serving as an inclusive platform for socializing and networking, the KEG event aims to inspire innovation and the free exchange of ideas within EAS - plus who could say no to free beer!
- **Division-Wide Poster Session:** To further enhance interdisciplinary collaboration and socializing through our scientific projects, GSAB proposes the introduction of a division-wide poster session, where graduate students from all departments within EAS can present their research. The purpose of the event would be to promote the exchange of ideas, encourage collaborative projects, and provide students with valuable feedback on their work and a chance to practice their oral presentation skills. This event could lead to unexpected collaborations that would enhance interdisciplinary research across campus. It would also expose first-year students to research labs outside their department that they could potentially work with.

### Initiatives Promoting Student-Faculty Interactions:

- **EAS Awards Ceremony:** GSAB proposes consolidating all awards granted within the EAS division into a single annual ceremony to inspire a sense of connection, celebrate achievements, and foster a stronger division-wide culture. Additionally, GSAB aims to establish a new “GSAB Faculty Mentoring Award” to recognize faculty members who demonstrate exceptional mentorship and support for graduate students in their labs.
- **Student-Faculty Lunches** GSAB seeks to host monthly lunches or coffee hours beginning winter of 2025 (at least three per term, including the summer, for a total of 12 events annually) to facilitate meaningful faculty-student engagement. Each event will bring together small groups of eight to ten graduate students with one or two faculty members, intentionally taking participants out of the lab environment to foster more relaxed, informal interactions. This initiative aims to serve up to 90 students throughout the remainder of the 2024-2025 year.

These sessions will be structured with icebreaker questions to encourage conversation and connection. Insights gained from these discussions, along with feedback collected through anonymous surveys, will be used to inform the development of additional programming led by the DPSS. This ongoing feedback loop will ensure the initiative remains responsive to student needs and continues to enhance faculty-student engagement.

We are currently seeking \$2040 in funding to cover 4 lunches and 5 coffee hours through September. This will allow 90 students to develop relationships with faculty members and each other while fostering community throughout EAS. We previously applied for but were not awarded funding from the Moore-Hufstедler Fund and the Graduate Student Council so we are instead asking for internal funding for these EAS focused initiatives.

These initiatives will serve as a foundation for increasing student engagement, enhancing the graduate student experience, and fostering a more inclusive and collaborative environment within the EAS Division.

## 2.3 EAS Guidebook

We have received feedback indicating that while Caltech offers a variety of resources and services to help students in their academic and personal lives, new students are often unaware of these benefits and only learn of them through word of mouth. The GSAB proposes creating an EAS Guidebook to compile answers to common questions and document little-known division and department resources, events, and policies. We plan to host the guidebook on a free website from IMSS with the domain name “easstudenthandbook.caltech.edu”. PDF copies will also be made available for download. IMSS charges \$15 per month for hosting services.

## Signatures

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