

BEST IN CLASS

BY JULIA EHLERT

What does it take for the most ambitious and innovative young minds to push the limits of possibility? **Curiosity. Perseverance. Ingenuity.** And an unparalleled student experience.

The Institute's newly launched Initiative for Caltech Students fundraising campaign will raise \$250 million toward five critical priorities that will allow Caltech to continue to provide a richly diverse, immersive, and inclusive student experience. With support from philanthropic partners—alumni, parents, trustees, foundations, corporations, and community members—Caltech can ensure that students maintain access to a robust research, education, and co-curricular ecosystem that is close-knit, collaborative, and has made the Institute a destination of choice for the future leaders in science, technology, and society for decades.

“My wish is that students will think of Caltech as the place where they can fulfill their dreams. The place where they discover passions they can explore and develop throughout their lifetimes,” says Caltech president Thomas F. Rosenbaum, holder of the Sonja and William Davidow Presidential Chair and professor of physics. “We help our students become well-rounded human beings to contribute significantly to

their chosen careers and to society: critical thinkers and problem solvers who rely on their training in science, engineering, the humanities, and social sciences, and leverage their appreciation of the arts, theater, sports, and community service. The Initiative for Caltech Students is going to support and enhance those opportunities, for the students of today and for those to come.”

What the Initiative Supports

One of the most critical functions of this campaign is to enable innovative and driven STEM students from around the world to access a world-class Caltech education, no matter their financial circumstances. **Undergraduate scholarships** have always allowed the most qualified, hard-working students to attend Caltech and devote themselves to learning. More than half of Caltech undergraduates receive need-based financial assistance. To make Caltech more accessible to all who are accepted and wish to attend, the initiative aspires to raise enough funding—through additional scholarships and other means—to **reduce or eliminate the need for student loans.**

From left to right: Caltech students **Cristian Ponce, Chi Cap, Xinhong Chen, Jieyu Zheng, and Aditee Prabhutendolkar.**

“When I was in high school, there was always a question of, ‘Even if I do get into college, will I be able to afford it?’ Learning about the QuestBridge Scholarship was such an eye-opening discovery because I realized if I worked hard, I would be able to go to Caltech and not have to worry about money. It was a huge stress relief for myself and my family. Thanks to my scholarship, I get to do really cool science, really cool research, and meet all these amazing people. I’m extremely grateful for this opportunity because if this didn’t exist, I would not be in college.”

—*Chi Cap, second-year undergraduate student, 2022–23 Robert Gardner Family Scholar, and QuestBridge Scholar. The QuestBridge National College Match program connects low-income, high-achieving students with partner schools like Caltech, which agree to provide full scholarships, including expenses, for matched students.*

Caltech's initiative FOR STUDENTS

Graduate fellowships enable Caltech to attract and retain the most talented students from across the world. The campaign aims to further Caltech's goal to **provide an endowed fellowship for every graduate student during their first two years.**

Such support would allow students the academic agility to explore a variety of intellectual interests before selecting an area of concentration for their doctoral research. Because these fellowships would not tether graduate students to advisors, laboratories, or federal grants, students will be free to partner with the research groups of their choice and, if desired, create interdisciplinary problem-solving collaborations to pursue.



"As scientists, we're basically kids playing in the sandbox at the frontier of human knowledge. Caltech gives us the freedom and trust to explore new ideas and enrich ourselves as people in every aspect of our lives. That is really what chasing passion means—finding new inspiration and continuing to refuel your interests. For me, that's what the Caltech experience means."

—Ben Thyer, graduate student

Career advising services provide the tools to transform a student's educational experiences and interests into a successful career pathway—whether in academia, industry, or public service. The Initiative for Caltech Students will **bolster the Career Advising and Experiential Learning (CAEL) program,** which gives students equitable access to resources, training, and connections, including access to the Institute's worldwide network of 25,000 alumni, so they can achieve their career aspirations.

"Caltech's network is beyond impressive, and it's really impacted my experience. It's amazing how open so many people are to mentor or help others around them."

—Cristian Ponce, second-year undergraduate student



The co-curricular experiences students have at Caltech, through their residential houses, their participation in athletics or the more than 100 student-led campus clubs, and through organizations like the Caltech Center for Inclusion and Diversity, help students find balance and belonging in the Institute's rigorous academic environment. The Initiative's goal is to **enrich these co-curricular programs, services, and organizations** that foster community and enable personal fulfillment.

"Most international students don't get to go home or see our families for a long time. It can be very challenging and isolating. But having an organization like the Caltech C [the Caltech Chinese Association] provides a sense of community, a place to share our culture, and a feeling of home here at Caltech."

—Xinhong Chen, graduate student and former president of the Caltech C



The **health and wellness resources** that Caltech Student Wellness Services (SWS) provides help students find balance, manage stress, learn time management, and build connections throughout the Institute community. SWS also trains students to be peer health advocates and has developed strategic partnerships with the Office of Residential Experience, the Caltech Center for Inclusion and Diversity, International Student Programs, and the CARE Team to provide more robust programs that are integrated into students' everyday lives. **Enhancing these resources** will ensure that students get the most out of their Caltech experience.

"The student advocate roles are so important at Caltech. It can be intimidating for a student to talk to a stranger about something deeply personal, like a Title IX issue or mental health struggles. They feel better about going to someone they know and trust first. And then we can help them feel comfortable seeking help at a higher level when it's necessary and support them in connecting with those resources."

—Aditee Prabhutendolkar, third-year undergraduate student, peer advocate, health advocate, Title IX representative, and Blacker House president



"My first year at Caltech was all online—I was working from home and didn't know anyone. It was really tough. But when I was able to come to campus, participate in the swim team, and live in Page House, it had such a tremendous impact. I got to see people again; I was working better; I was learning more. This part of the community, it really helps your academic life. It means a lot."

—Rahul Chawlani, third-year undergraduate student, 2022–23 Robert and Phyllis Henigson Scholar, and Page House social director

"Being in a house and in the Black Students Union, it gives me a sense of belonging, and even more so, a sense of home. With the house system, you belong to a little home. With an identity-affiliated group like the Black Students Union, you get a little home as well. That's the biggest thing these spaces have provided me with—I don't feel like I'm some 'admitted student number 101'; I'm Ramona in Blacker House or Ramona from the BSU."

—Ramona Murugu, second-year undergraduate student and co-founder of the Black Students Union



"Through the Caltech Women in Biology and Biological Engineering (WiBBE) club, I was connected with a really great mentor [Sisi Chen]—she is the most amazing person I've ever met. She taught me that when you feel burned out, the best way to get out of it is to contribute to the community. Giving back is the best way to enrich yourself. I really took that advice to heart, and now I'm incorporating more opportunities to give back to the community into my daily life."

—Jieyu Zheng, graduate student