

Policy on Conflict of Interest and Commitment with Regard to Outside Activities for Graduate Students

This policy addresses Conflicts of Interest and Commitment with regard to graduate students' outside activities and should be considered in addition to Caltech's codes of conduct and other applicable policies and procedures. The Institute has a long-standing philosophy that all graduate students should be given the opportunity to be completely focused on graduate studies and research. This is one of the unique aspects of Caltech's graduate school and a key factor in the high level of productivity and accomplishment by our graduate students. To enable this, the faculty and Institute provide financial aid in the form of fellowships, tuition scholarships, graduate teaching and research assistantships. The stipend and salary levels for students are modest but sufficient for economical students to live debt-free during their graduate studies. The financial support provided by the Institute and the requirements for continuous enrollment also enables almost all students to complete the degree programs in a timely manner. In turn, the Institute expects that graduate students should be 100% committed to graduate studies while enrolled in a graduate program. Graduate students are expected to be continuously enrolled full-time, year-round, until they complete their degree program. In addition, graduate students should not accept employment, start or run a business, or engage in any activity inside or outside of the Institute that creates a conflict of commitment with their full-time, degree-seeking status.

Exceptions

There are some very limited exceptions to this policy. The Institute encourages extracurricular activities that provide service to the community and do not impact the student's academic progress or full-time status. The Institute also recognizes that some students desire to gain experience as instructors or work in an educational or research setting outside of Caltech.

Outside Employment

With the permission of the Dean of Graduate Studies (Dean), students may accept limited-duration, part-time employment for these purposes. The official policy on outside employment for graduate students is found in the Caltech Catalog:

"Graduate students receiving any form of financial aid from the Institute are required to report to the dean of graduate studies any financial aid from other sources. With prior written approval from the dean of graduate studies, students may be allowed to accept outside employment if the time commitment does not interfere with their graduate studies. The number of hours per week spent on outside employment must be reported to the dean of graduate studies."

Students must declare to the Dean of Graduate Studies, all external funding, including fellowships, awards, or employment, part or full time which supports their academic activities/research. The Institute may adjust Institute financial aid allocated, accordingly, to maintain the stipend within the Institute guidelines and to recover tuition from outside sources whenever possible. A student's financial aid and/or Institute salary may be reduced if the income is significant and, in the case of long term, unreported employment activities, the student may be asked to repay financial aid.

Students may not hold a position of line responsibility in an outside enterprise for pay or profit. Students must have the approval of their Advisor, the Option Representative, and the Dean in order to engage in any outside employment activities. International students on a visa are further required to consult with the office of International Student Programs to determine eligibility. Students must provide official documentation of the financial award or salary, as well as submit a request to the Graduate Studies Office (a petition is on the website) before accepting any employment. Permission to engage in outside

employment is contingent on the student maintaining satisfactory academic progress as determined by the Dean in consultation with the Advisor and Option Representative.

Non-Paid Activities

Students must have the approval of their Advisor, the Option Representative, and the Dean in order to engage in or continue in any outside activities wherein the time committed to those activities may impact the student's progress toward completion of his/her degree.

Leave of Absence

Students who work full-time off campus in a commercial organization are advised to take a leave of absence (non-medical sabbatical). They will not be enrolled during this time and the "clock" will stop on their graduate career. Taking a leave of absence in order to work requires the endorsement of the Advisor and permission of the Dean. A leave of absence is always required when the job is not research-related. Students that need to stop their studies to address health issues should take a medical leave of absence which requires the endorsement of the Senior Director of the Health and Counseling Center as well as the permission of the Dean.

Detached Duty

In some cases, a student may be employed by a laboratory or research institute but still engaged in research directly related to their degree program. Another situation is that a student may be invited to be a visiting researcher at another university or the student may need to be working with a faculty member who has left Caltech and is working at another Institution. Students may also be away from campus to participate in internships at commercial organizations as part of their research program.

These students may go on detached duty rather than on leave of absence if the Advisor and Graduate Dean approve and there is documentation of an internship or research program and appropriate mentoring. The student should submit the documentation and a petition to the Graduate Studies Office. Students on detached duty are still enrolled as full-time students but are in residence at another location. They may be paid by Caltech or through another organization. It is the students responsibility to continue to be registered and in full-time status while on detached duty. Detached duty petitions are usually only valid for a limited time, less than one year, and can be renewed upon request.

Consulting and Other Entrepreneurial Activities

Students should familiarize themselves with the [Caltech Conflict of Interest Policy](#), the Caltech Personnel Memoranda on [Conflict of Interest, Outside Employment, Consulting and Business Activity \(Outside Activity\)](#) as well as the [Caltech Ethics Handbook: Doing Business the Caltech Way](#). Graduate students are sometimes approached to perform paid consulting or are inspired to be entrepreneurs. In these cases, students have to be exceptionally careful not to create conflicts of commitment or conflicts of interest through these activities. Students may not engage in any consulting activities that interfere with their primary graduate student activities of learning and research. Scrupulous care must be taken to ensure that Caltech's name and its letterhead neither be used directly in any correspondence between the student and the company the student wishes to consult for, nor in any reports that student may submit to the company. It is important that Caltech's name not appear in any publicity or commercial presentation either in promotion of student consulting activities or the promotion of the company. Students must avoid any financial conflict of interest, particularly consulting or being employed for companies (including start-ups) that are doing business with or sponsoring research at Caltech.

Of particular concern are students consulting or accepting employment from a company in which their advisor or other Caltech faculty directing a student's research has a significant interest or is a paid consultant. In such cases, the Division Chair must approve any student involvement in the activities performed for the company and the student must sign a written disclosure to signify his/her understanding of the issues involved. In some cases, the advisor may be required to submit a research management plan to address how the students' activities will be appropriately managed, and the Division Chair may issue a conflict management plan to be followed.

Finally, Graduate students should not enter into any consulting or employment agreement with intellectual property encumbrances or confidentiality provisions that are in conflict with the student's commitments to Caltech or which may compromise progress toward his/her thesis. The student should notify the company, in writing, that the work is being done by the student as an individual, that no position of line responsibility for the work can be accepted, that Caltech assumes no responsibility for the work, that the name of Caltech may not be used in reports or publicity resulting from the work, and that the student has primary intellectual property obligations to Caltech. The company should acknowledge this statement as evidence of the understanding upon which the work is to be done. The following is provided as a template for graduate students to use for this purpose:

"[NAME OF COMPANY] understands and acknowledges that [NAME OF STUDENT]'s primary obligation is to the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) where [he/she] is a graduate student pursuing a doctoral degree. [NAME OF COMPANY] acknowledges and agrees that [NAME OF STUDENT] has previously signed an Intellectual Property Agreement assigning all intellectual property, inclusive of data, patentable items and copyrights to Caltech. [NAME OF STUDENT]'s work for or commitment to [COMPANY] shall not interfere with [NAME OF STUDENT]'s obligations to Caltech and all agreements between Caltech and [NAME OF STUDENT] shall take precedence and control over any agreements between [NAME OF STUDENT] and [COMPANY]. [NAME OF COMPANY] also represents that [NAME OF COMPANY] will provide reasonable advance notice to [NAME OF STUDENT] of any legal restrictions imposed on [NAME OF STUDENT]'s use of information or data arising from [his/her] work."

If there are any questions about the proprietary of any outside activity or agreements, this should be discussed with the Graduate Studies Office and if necessary, the Office of Research Compliance and the Office of the General Counsel.