



BOARD OF CONTROL California Institute of Technology

May 2023

Dear New Student,

As you begin your preparation for Caltech in earnest, it is time to formally introduce the Honor System to you.

Every group of people has some collection of social norms that govern its members. Caltech is no exception. These standards guide personal conduct, set expectations for individuals, and prohibit certain actions. Most importantly, they allow members of the community to interact on a fair and level playing field.

There are two distinct methods for establishing such guidelines. The first is to enumerate specific inappropriate actions and assign corresponding punishments. The second is to define an overarching philosophy that guides the spirit of every member's actions. Most communities are forced to adopt the former. At Caltech we are fortunate to live under the latter.

The system Caltech has embraced is the Honor System. It is guided by the Honor Code, which succinctly states that "No member of the Caltech community shall take unfair advantage of any other member of the Caltech community." Students, faculty, staff, and administration are all expected to maintain a high level of respect and integrity in all aspects of life at Caltech.

Caltech's Honor System establishes a community of mutual trust which bestows great freedom upon its members. As undergraduates we enjoy several academic and non-academic privileges that would be impossible to maintain without a generalized Honor System. These include ubiquitous take-home exams, collaboration policies that encourage student cooperation, after-hours access to buildings and labs, a close-knit student community, and many other advantages that make Caltech life significantly more enjoyable.

Following the Caltech Honor System is a responsibility shared by every member of the community. Doing so is an active process, and as a Caltech student you will need to evaluate whether the decisions you make align with the spirit of our Honor System. Because the Honor System is a philosophical guideline rather than a shopping list of specific expectations, it is often necessary to contemplate which actions constitute an unfair advantage. There are many ways to help answer such questions, but ultimately it is each student's individual responsibility to understand and follow the implications of the Honor Code.

Soon you will be receiving placement tests to evaluate which classes are best suited for you upon enrollment. These are timed, unproctored exams, and they have specific guidelines and expectations designed to give all students equal opportunity to demonstrate their understanding. These exams are governed by the Honor System. As a member of the Caltech community, you are expected to honor the trust placed in you.

This fall, we will send you a more detailed Honor Code handbook and give a presentation at Orientation. These will flesh out your understanding of the Honor System and provide relevant examples for you to consider. Additionally, they will outline the mechanisms that are in place to maintain the integrity of the Honor Code: the Board of Control and Conduct Review Committee, which investigate allegations of academic and non-academic Honor System violations, respectively.

As the current chair and co-secretaries of the Board of Control, we encourage you to learn about the Honor Code and contact us with any questions you may have. We look forward to meeting you this fall!

Sincerely,

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