July 12, 2019

Dear Incoming Undergraduate,

Welcome to the Caltech community! We look forward to your arrival on campus.

Written communication is a crucial element of the process by which scientists and engineers share their work and their research with others. For this reason, writing is central to the Caltech undergraduate experience, from the first-year core through advanced coursework in the options to summer SURF and other research projects. You will have many opportunities to refine and develop your writing skills across a range of disciplines and communication contexts.

It is important that student writers understand some of the shared assumptions about citation and crediting the work of others that guide university scholarship and research. For this reason, Caltech has prepared a summer learning module for incoming students on “Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism.” You are required to complete this learning module before beginning your coursework at Caltech.

While many factors shape successful academic writing, avoiding plagiarism and crediting the work of others is particularly important. This is central to the values of any research and learning community, and it is also an ethical matter that involves the Caltech honor system. The failure to appropriately credit the work of others in coursework and research is a violation of the honor code.

We understand that you have learned about appropriate citation practices and avoiding plagiarism as a part of your high school coursework. However, our experience has shown that as many as two-thirds of incoming Caltech undergraduates do not understand some element of appropriate citation practices and avoiding plagiarism. For this reason, it is important that you attend closely to the material in this learning module, even where it may be a review of what you already know.

On September 2, 2019, you will receive an invitation to complete the “Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism” module at your Caltech email address. This learning module requires internet access, and should take about an hour of your time. We require that you complete it no later than September 30, 2019. Your completion of this module will be tracked and confirmed in advance of your arrival on campus.

Sincerely,

Kevin Gilmartin
Dean of Undergraduate Students
William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of English