I would like to welcome our new graduate students and wish you all a Happy New Year. Even though 2016 is still a few months away, orientation week and the start of classes in the fall marks the beginning of the new academic year that to many of us effectively represents the conclusion of one year and the launching of the next. This is a time of transition, particularly for new G1 graduate students starting on campus, and while the transition from GN to GN+1 for the veterans may not be a dramatic, it is a reminder that time inexorably marches on.

The entering G1 graduate class has 260 students – nearly a record – with 93 women (35%) and 149 (57%) international students, both records. Since the first graduate student was admitted to Caltech (then Throop Institute) in 1916, our G1s are the last group of students to matriculate during the first 100 years of our graduate program. The first Caltech PhD was awarded in 1920 in Chemistry and Crystallography to Roscoe Gilkey Dickinson; as the average time to the PhD degree is about 5.7 years, more than half of the incoming class will receive their degrees following the centennial of Dickinson’s degree.

As with our G1s, I also find myself in a new position, namely having the privilege to serve as Dean of Graduate Studies. Although I have no Caltech degrees, my advisor, my advisor’s advisor and my advisor’s advisor’s advisor (Roscoe Gilkey Dickinson) all received their PhDs in Chemistry from Caltech, and so the Caltech graduate program has had a major influence on my scientific career. 40 years ago, when I was a first year graduate student, if I had thought about this, I would have assumed in 40 years I would know all there is to know about graduate school and the academic world. I can assure you that this is not the case, and in many ways, I feel like a G1 about to start on an adventure where one knows approximately where one is headed, but not precisely how to get there or what perils may be encountered.

The role of the Graduate Office is to coordinate the support and services necessary to sustain you on your graduate school adventure. The Graduate Office is also experiencing transitions; Joe Shepherd (Caltech PhD 1981), my predecessor as Dean of Graduate Studies, is now the Vice President for Student Affairs, and Felicia Hunt has transitioned from Graduate Associate Dean to Assistant Vice President for Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Initiatives, and remains our Title IX Coordinator. Joe and Felicia have left our graduate program with a tremendous legacy (and in their new capacities still play major roles). Fortunately, the Graduate Office has great depth, with Natalie Gilmore (Assistant Dean), Helen Duong (Recruitment, Outreach and Admissions Coordinator), Claudia Andrade (Financial Management Analyst) and Larissa Charnsangavej (Residence Life Coordinator) continuing to work their magic on your behalf.

The Graduate Office is the coordinating office for all matters related to graduate-level studies at Caltech. I would like to encourage you to think of the Graduate Office as a key resource, along with your option reps and option administrators, if you have questions related to the graduate program.

Have a great year!

Doug Rees
Dean of Graduate Studies, Caltech