

2026-2027 Laney Graduate Student Council (LGSC) Executive Board Candidates

Campaigning Dates: April 9 – Close of Polls

Voting Dates: April 17 – May 1 (online)

LGSC will send an email to all graduate students with the link to the online ballot once it opens.

Candidates are listed in alphabetical order by their last names.

Candidate for President (Vote for 1 person)

1. Ozgenur (Ozzie) Celik

Name: Ozgenur (Ozzie) Celik

Program and Year: PhD in Biomedical Engineering, Third Year

Candidate Statement: Hello, my name is Ozgenur (“Ozzie”) Celik, and I am a third-year Ph.D. student in Biomedical Engineering. I am excited to run for President of the Laney Graduate Student Council (LGSC) after serving as Divisional Treasurer during the 2025–2026 academic year.

As Treasurer, I saw firsthand how LGSC can directly impact students—through conference funding, support for student organizations, and building spaces for connection.

In this role, I worked to make funding more transparent, efficient, and equitable for all Laney RSOs. I helped oversee the 2026–2027 budget approval process, allocated supplemental funding to organizations, and managed finances for major LGSC events, including the Gala. I also supported RSO leaders by organizing a Zoom help desk and improving communication during the budget cycle—ensuring timely submissions and helping organizations secure the funding they need. I am especially proud to have contributed to a 20% increase in travel grant awards for the upcoming year.

As President, I will build on this momentum by:

1. Expanding travel grants so more students can present their work
2. Partnering with the LGS Career Office to offer professional development and alumni networking opportunities, including an AI/ML speaker series
3. Strengthening student organizations and enhancing social programming to foster a stronger sense of belonging at Laney

I care deeply about making graduate school not just productive, but supportive and connected. I understand how LGSC operates and, more importantly, the needs and challenges of our student body. I would be honored to continue advocating for you and helping make Laney a place where all graduate students can thrive.



Candidates for Vice President (Vote for 1 person)

1. Yuhao (Lauren) Gao
2. Hyung Ji (Sophia) Lee

Name: Yuhao (Lauren) Gao

Program and Year: PhD in Neuroscience, Third Year

Candidate Statement: Hi! I'm Lauren and I am running for Vice President of the LGSC because I care deeply about building a graduate student community that is structured, well-supported, and connected. Over the past year, I have served as LGSC Social Chair, which has given me direct experience working within the council executive board, participating in general body meetings, and coordinating across external partners and Emory offices. Through this role, I have become familiar with LGSC's structure, responsibilities, and leadership needs.

I am also experienced in student organization leadership more broadly, and I understand both the opportunities and challenges student leaders face in communication, event planning, funding access, and maintaining active organizational status. As Vice President, I want to make LGSC a more effective and reliable partner for student organizations. That starts with more timely, direct communication, so RSOs have clear guidance on organizational requirements and university processes. I also want to improve continuity by making officer transition guidance, funding information, and organizational resources easier to access, helping student leaders manage their groups more smoothly and maintain active status year to year.

I want to help make general body meetings more meaningful and make sure student organizations feel supported by a council that is clear, responsive, and reliable. I would bring a collaborative mindset, strong follow-through, and a genuine commitment to serving the Laney graduate student community.



Name: Hyung Ji (Sophia) Lee

Program and Year: PhD in Chemistry, Third Year

Candidate Statement: I would be honored to serve as the Vice President of the Laney Graduate Student Council (LGSC) for the 2026-2027 academic year. My leadership experience as a student ambassador for the Catalysis Innovation Consortium (CIC) and a mentor for the Association for Women in Science (AWIS) has equipped me with the ability to facilitate clear communication and provide the strategic direction necessary to help others navigate their professional futures in science. I am now eager to diverge from Chemistry department to advocate for a broader range of perspectives across the Laney community.

During my time as a Graduate Student Instructor, I was directly involved in an honor code case. This firsthand encounter with the disciplinary process provided me with invaluable insight into the importance of academic integrity and the delicate balance required to uphold university



standards. This experience directly inspires my interest in the Vice presidency, where I would serve as the Chair of the Honor Council to ensure such matters are handled with the fairness and discipline they require. If elected, I will leverage my organizational experience to assist the President in the seamless operation of the LGSC. I am committed to enforcing attendance to ensure every chartered organization is heard, overseeing transparent elections, and recruiting a diverse pool of candidates to represent our student body.

Candidate for Secretary (Vote for 1 person)

1. Oyeronke Popoola

Name: Oyeronke Popoola

Program and Year: PhD in Genetics and Molecular Biology, Second Year

Candidate Statement: I am running for LGSC secretary because I would like to help be a part of fostering an environment for Laney graduate students to come together and get to know one another. There are many programs within Laney, and the events held by LGSC allow everyone to get to know one another and doesn't make Emory feel so big. I've been secretary before for an organization called Key Club where I performed similar roles to this position such as taking minutes for meetings, organizing events, and communicating to the members of the organization. I hope to add my expertise to this organization and to continue the great work already done. I hope to continue to build a collaborative space for students.

Candidate for Divisional Treasurer (Vote for 1 person)

1. Joao Paulo Pera Mendes

Name: Joao Paulo Pera Mendes

Program and Year: PhD in Biomedical Engineering, Third Year

Candidate Statement: I am submitting my candidacy for LGSC Treasurer. My primary goal is to provide fair, transparent, and efficient financial management for all Emory graduate students. I plan to build on the current administration's progress, maintaining stability while improving the funding process for all student organizations.

My background includes strong financial oversight and organizational leadership. As Secretary and Board Member for the Latin American Student Association in my undergraduate, I managed official records and oversaw critical deadlines for the school's Student Activity Fund. Beyond monitoring organization expenses, I coordinated the logistics and funding for large community service events. This role required careful tracking of university allocations and maintaining clear financial transparency with the student body.

Additionally, as Vice President of the Robotics Club in my undergrad, I helped the launch of a new organization on campus. I was the primary contact for securing our initial university funding to support equipment purchases and daily operations. I also drafted the club's constitution, establishing the rules and financial accountability needed for official university recognition. Growing our membership while managing the initial budget required careful planning and a focus on clear results.

While my training as a doctoral candidate in Biomedical Engineering provides a strong analytical foundation for managing budgets, my focus as Treasurer will be universal. I am committed to supporting the financial interests of the entire Emory graduate community. By applying my background in strategic planning and resource allocation, I will ensure LGSC funds are managed responsibly and effectively.



Candidates for Travel Treasurer (Vote for 1 person)

1. Ermias Assefa
2. Jingyun (Selina) Qian
3. Lauhitya Reddy
4. Assis Siyadri

Name: Ermias Assefa

Program and Year: Master's in Computer Science and Biomedical Informatics, First Year

Candidate Statement: I am running for Travel Treasurer because, as a graduate student, I understand how important conference travel can be. Presenting research, meeting people in your field, and being part of academic conversations can open real doors, but the cost of travel can also be a major barrier. I want to help make those opportunities more accessible for students like us. I am interested in this position because I care about supporting graduate students in practical ways that have a real impact. Sometimes even a small amount of funding can make the difference between attending a conference and missing out. I want to be part of making that process smoother, clearer, and more equitable.

I believe I am qualified for this role because I am organized, detail-oriented, and committed to serving others responsibly. I take deadlines and processes seriously, and I know how important it is to communicate clearly when people are depending on funding and timely updates. If elected, I hope to make a greater impact by helping students better understand how to apply for travel support, what documents they need, and what to expect during the process. I want to make the system feel less stressful and more approachable. My goal is to help more graduate students take advantage of opportunities that support their research, professional growth, and future careers.

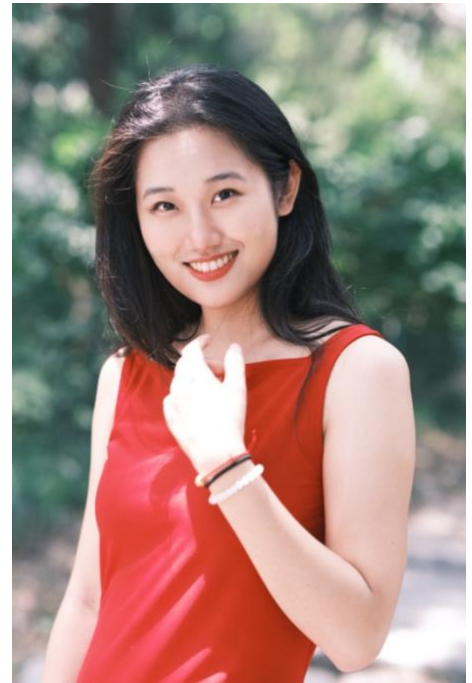
Name: Jingyun (Selina) Qian

Program and Year: PhD in Computer Science, First Year

Candidate Statement: Sometimes all it takes is a little encouragement to get started, and that's exactly what I want to bring to the role of Travel Treasurer.

I'm running for this position because I want to be more engaged in our community, build meaningful connections, and help fellow students navigate the resources available to them. I know firsthand how much of a difference it makes when someone takes the time to make a process feel approachable rather than intimidating.

As president of the Women in Math Club at Davidson College, I learned what it means to serve a community. I organized volunteer events for K–12 students, hosted weekly coffee chats that brought faculty and students together, and coordinated alumni presentation events, which included managing the travel budget for guest speakers. After two years of serving, I grew our club's budget by 30%, which also funded hands-on events like 3D printing workshops and tote-bag-making sessions. That experience taught me how to manage budgets responsibly, advocate for funding, and create spaces where people feel welcome.



As Travel Treasurer, I want to bring that same energy to three key areas. First, transparency. I'll make sure students know exactly how applications are evaluated, what the criteria are, and when they can expect a decision. Second, encouragement. I want to actively reach out so more students feel confident applying for travel funds. Third, efficiency. I'll be responsive, accountable, and work to streamline the reimbursement process so no one is left waiting or confused.

Name: Lauhitya Reddy

Program and Year: PhD in Biomedical Informatics/Computer Science, First Year

Candidate Statement: Hello all,

One of the biggest preventers of more events on campus is the ease of getting reimbursed/allocatted money. Im hoping to reduce that friction, specifically, by making it easier to send in and submit expenses, whether travel related or in support of the divisional treasurer.

Name: Assis Siyadri

Program and Year: Master's in Computer Science, First Year

Candidate Statement: I am excited to run for the Travel Treasurer position within the Laney Graduate Student Council. As a first-year MS Computer Science student at Emory, I understand firsthand how critical conference travel funding is for graduate students looking to share their research and grow professionally and I want to make that process as smooth and accessible as possible for my peers.

My background gives me a strong foundation for this role. Through my work as a Catalog Specialist at Amazon (via Collabera), I developed experience managing data workflows, ensuring accuracy and compliance, and collaborating with cross-functional teams skills that translate directly to processing travel grant applications with precision and accountability. My ongoing ML research at Emory has further strengthened my ability to organize files, verify data integrity, and maintain structured workflows under deadlines.

As Travel Treasurer, I would prioritize clear communication with students about how to apply for travel grants, streamline the application review process, and ensure funds are distributed fairly and efficiently. I also hope to work closely with the Divisional Treasurer to support broader LGSC financial operations wherever needed.

I am organized, detail-oriented, and genuinely committed to supporting the Emory graduate student community. I would be honored to serve in this role and help my fellow students access the opportunities they deserve.

Best,

Assis Siyadri

Candidates for Event Manager (Vote for 2 people)

1. Abigail Halloran
2. Binh Vo

Name: Abigail Halloran

Program and Year: PhD in Chemistry, Second Year

Candidate Statement: I am excited to apply for the Event Manager role for the LGSC and to help create an engaging and welcoming graduate student experience. My undergraduate leadership roles gave me hands-on experience in planning events, promoting them effectively, and coordinating with teams to make sure everything runs smoothly.

As an undergraduate student at the University of Alabama, I served as the Social Media Manager for the American Chemical Society student chapter, where I created flyers and digital announcements to promote club meetings and events. I also worked as the Event Planner for the University of Alabama Chemistry Honor Society, where I organized both professional and social events. These included guest seminars, networking opportunities, and our annual induction reception. Through this role, I gained experience managing logistics, coordinating schedules, and working within a budget while balancing different types of programming.

I am excited for the opportunity to create events that people look forward to attending and fostering a sense of belonging and community within the graduate community here at Emory!



Name: Binh Vo

Program and Year: PhD in Chemistry, Third Year

Candidate Statement: I am running for Event Manager because I want to bring programming to LGSC that is both fresh and genuinely useful – building on strong traditions while introducing new events to our community.

My experience has prepared me well. As Communications Chair of AWIS, I co-organized multiple events including game nights, trivia nights, and a tri-organization forum (joint effort from AWIS, PACS, and NOBBChE) bringing together researchers across the Department of Chemistry, while also managing event promotion through newsletters and social media. As an executive board member of IGSS, I helped organize the Iftar Party and Spring Festival, celebrating multicultural traditions through authentic cuisines, culture, and joy.

If elected, I want to introduce two categories of new programming. On the professional side, I hope to partner with Laney Graduate School to launch career development events tailored by discipline – resume review sessions, mock interview workshops, elevator pitch competitions, and career panels spanning academia, industry, and beyond.



On the community side, I want to create opportunities for genuine connection outside the lab. I would like to extend Woodruff Library's pet therapy sessions to graduate students, giving us a dedicated space to decompress with our four-legged study companions. I also want to organize a student-faculty sports day at McDonough Field – volleyball, badminton, soccer, and a picnic – where students and PIs can connect outside the lab. Finally, I would launch a roving departmental coffee break series, bringing LGSC into different buildings so students can connect without ever leaving their corner of campus.

Candidates for Ticket Liaison (Vote for 2 people)

1. Aksana Doss
2. Tamaratare Ogu
3. Blessing Sakhala
4. Ankit Saraf
5. Connor Smith
6. Rachel (Ah Joung) Yu

Name: Aksana Doss

Program and Year: PhD in Biomedical Engineering, Second Year

Candidate Statement: My name is Aksana, and I am a second-year PhD student in Biomedical Engineering. I am excited to run for the Ticket Liaison position because I am passionate about creating opportunities that help graduate students feel connected, engaged, and supported beyond the classroom and lab.

I bring strong experience in event coordination, budgeting, and student engagement. I currently serve as the treasurer of a cultural student organization that I co-founded to bring Central Asian students together. In this role, I have organized events, submitted budgets, and managed purchases in accordance with university policies. I also regularly design surveys to understand student preferences, from meal choices to social activities, which has helped us create events that are both meaningful and well attended.

In addition, my experience in biotech consulting strengthened my ability to collaborate with diverse groups, communicate clearly, and understand community needs. These skills would help me effectively manage ticket purchasing, conduct student interest surveys, coordinate fair ticket distribution, and keep students informed about upcoming events.

As Ticket Liaison, I hope to make athletic and cultural events more accessible, ensure ticket offerings reflect student interests, and help foster a stronger sense of community among Laney graduate students.

Name: Tamaratare Ogu

Program and Year: PhD in Biochemistry, Cell & Developmental Biology, First Year

Candidate Statement: I am applying for the Ticket Liaison position because I genuinely love sports and live events, and I know how much they can break up the intensity of graduate school. Grad school can easily become all work, and I think having hobbies, whether it's going to a game, a concert, or just getting out for something fun, is really important for staying balanced and not burning out. Some of my favorite moments have come from experiences like that, and I would love to help make them more accessible to other LGS students.

I'm someone who pays attention to the details but also thinks about the bigger picture, like what people actually enjoy, and what will get them to show up. I'm organized, reliable, and comfortable coordinating things behind the scenes while keeping communication clear and straightforward. I also care a lot about making sure opportunities like this feel fair and open to everyone.



If I'm selected, I hope to create events that people are genuinely excited to attend, events that feel worth their time, are easy to sign up for, and are clearly communicated. I want to build something students naturally engage with, not something they have to think twice about.

At the end of the day, I want to make it easier for people to step away from work, enjoy what they love, and feel more connected to the community.

Name: Blessing Sakhala

Program and Year: Master's in Development Practice, First Year

Candidate Statement: I am interested to apply for the Ticket Liaison position because I believe that shared experiences beyond the classroom strengthen our graduate community and enhance student well-being. This role aligns perfectly with my commitment to fostering engagement among LGS students and creating spaces that promote connection, inclusion, and enjoyment. I am particularly drawn to the opportunity to curate cultural and athletic events that reflect the diverse interests of our student body.

My professional and academic background has equipped me with strong organizational, communication, and analytical skills that directly support the responsibilities of the position. Through previous roles in event planning and project coordination within both academic and development settings, I have successfully managed budgets, coordinated logistics, and facilitated outreach efforts that required attention to detail and responsiveness. I also have experience conducting surveys and analyzing participant feedback to guide data-informed decision-making, skills that will allow me to effectively administer the Ticket Purchases for Resale budget line and plan events that resonate with students.

If selected, I hope to enhance transparency and fairness in ticket distribution through an efficient and equitable system. Additionally, I plan to maintain an active communication strategy across LGS channels and the website to ensure that students remain informed about upcoming events. Overall, I am enthusiastic about supporting the Ticket Liaison program as a means to enrich the graduate experience and nurture a sense of belonging within our academic community.

Name: Ankit Saraf

Program and Year: PhD in Organization and Management, First Year

Candidate Statement: I am Ankit Saraf, a PhD student in Organization & Management, and I am running for the Ticket Liaison position. I am interested in this position because attending these events has been a refreshing break that I have often needed during graduate school, and I would love to help make that experience more accessible for others in the community.

I believe I would be a strong fit for this role because I have worked for several years in job roles which trained me in managing stakeholders and following through with consistency. I also have an MBA in Marketing and Strategy which trained me in managing such programming.

If elected, I would work to make ticket-related communication timely, transparent, and easy to navigate.



Name: Connor Smith

Program and Year: PhD in Genetics and Molecular Biology, Second Year

Candidate Statement: Hello. I am Connor and have been passionate about tickets since I was a little boy. I come from a long line of ticket liaisons, and my father always used to say "Connor, you are a very special little Connor and one day you will grow up to be a ticket liaison just like me, your pepppep". This is an opportunity to finally make my pepppep proud.

I plan to approach the position in a philosophical way. What is a ticket? Oxford dictionary would say "a piece of paper or card (or an electronic equivalent) that gives the holder a certain right, especially to enter a place, travel by public transport, or participate in an event", but I think it could be so much more. In 2026, things are bad. When people hear the word "ticket", they think of police, getting pulled over, and bad things. I want to go back to a simpler time when the word "ticket" invoked thoughts of the golden ticket from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

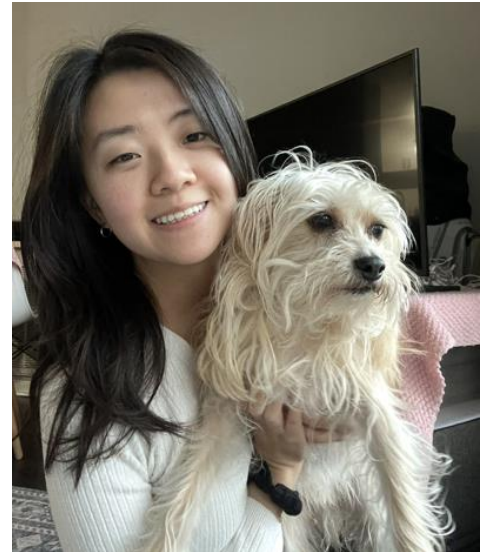
Overall, I am an ideal candidate for this position. I will be a strong, but fair leader. I believe receiving tickets in a good way is an unalienable right all Americans, and graduate students, should have. Additionally, if anyone loses a ticket raffle, they can hang out with me instead if I'm not busy. I barely even care about the \$500 incentive. What I care about is the tickets. Vote for me.



Name: Ah Joung (Rachel) Yu

Program and Year: PhD in Biomedical Engineering, First Year

Candidate Statement: Hi! My name is Rachel and I am excited to apply for the Ticket Liaison position because I am passionate about fostering a more connected graduate student community. Local athletic and cultural events provide meaningful opportunities for students to build relationships and decompress from academic stress, and I am eager to help make these experiences more accessible. I am well-qualified for this role due to my strong organizational skills, attention to detail, and experience coordinating group activities. Through my research and collaborative work, I have learned to manage multiple responsibilities, communicate clearly, and follow structured processes. If selected, I aim to design thoughtful surveys, ensure clear communication about events, and maintain a fair and accessible ticket allocation process. Ultimately, I want to help make our grad student experience more enriched through providing tickets to fun events!



Candidate for University Liaison (Vote for 1 person)

1. Tatenda Masendu (Tagutanazvo)

Name: Tatenda Masendu (Tagutanazvo)

Program and Year: Master's in Development Practice, First Year

Candidate Statement: I am seeking the role of University Liaison because my academic training, professional experience, and personal values all align with the responsibility of strengthening communication, advocacy, and representation within the Laney Graduate School community. Throughout my work in public health, community engagement, and cross-cultural leadership, I have learned how essential it is for institutions to listen intentionally and communicate transparently. I am motivated to bring that same commitment to the LGSC by serving as a bridge between students, leadership, and the broader Emory community.

My background includes leading collaborative projects, facilitating dialogue across diverse groups, and communicating complex information in ways that are accessible and actionable. Whether coordinating community-based initiatives, supporting student-focused programming, or managing professional communication channels, I have consistently centered clarity, empathy, and accountability. These experiences have prepared me to represent graduate students in University Senate meetings, engage thoughtfully with LGS administration, and ensure that student concerns are elevated to the appropriate channels.

As University Liaison, I hope to strengthen the visibility of LGSC initiatives, expand communication through digital platforms, and create more intentional opportunities for students to voice their needs. I am particularly committed to advocating for equity, belonging, and student well-being values that have guided my work and leadership thus far.

I believe deeply in the power of informed, connected communities. It would be an honor to serve as University Liaison and contribute to a more transparent, responsive, and engaged graduate student experience at Laney.

