

Industry Advisory Board Meeting – November 19, 2025

Executive Summary

GEL

Leo McGonagle presented an update on the GEL program's ongoing efforts to track and demonstrate its impact, emphasizing that the work was still in progress rather than a finished product. He framed the discussion around combining quantitative data from longitudinal alumni surveys with qualitative snapshots of individual students and alumni. Survey results showed that alumni credited GEL with helping them succeed as technical leaders, would strongly recommend the program, advanced more quickly in their careers than non-GEL peers in the School of Engineering, and were more likely to remain in technical roles.

He then highlighted 2025 as a particularly strong year for GEL students and alumni. A current senior, Alice Hall, served as MIT Undergraduate Association President and was named a Rhodes Scholar, making her the second GEL student to receive that honor in six years. Leo noted that, out of 192 Rhodes Scholars worldwide during that period, two were GEL students, which he viewed as a notable concentration. He also emphasized that two of the past four MIT Undergraduate Association Presidents had been GEL students.

Leo next discussed alumni achievements in aerospace and entrepreneurship. Adam Fuhrmann, a Course 16 alum, was named a NASA Astronaut Candidate, and another GEL alum had been a finalist for the astronaut program in two of the previous three years. He also cited Cameron McCord, a 2013 alum, whose company Nominal was named to the Forbes Next Billion Dollar Startups list, along with fellow alum Andrew Dorne.

He concluded with additional examples of alumni who had founded companies or advanced rapidly into senior engineering leadership roles. These included founders and CEOs of companies such as Semgrep and Blue Energy, a founder recognized on the Forbes 30 Under 30 list, and alumni holding senior roles at companies working on fusion energy, autonomous aviation, and space systems. Leo emphasized that while not all alumni had "arrived," many were progressing quickly and meaningfully as engineering leaders, illustrating the program's broader impact.

Discussion

The group discussed the challenge of measuring program impact beyond career advancement. Art Reidel stressed that the program's real value lay in how alumni performed and behaved as leaders, not just the positions they reached, even though this was difficult to quantify.

They noted that alumni surveys and interviews helped capture career satisfaction, leadership style, and lessons learned, while privacy limits restricted direct employer feedback except in contexts like the GradEL residency. The discussion emphasized the importance of understanding which skills alumni credited to the program to justify investment and improve it

Dan Riccio stressed the importance of understanding which skills alumni credited to the program to justify investment and improve it, and Art suggested that employer leadership awards could serve as an additional indicator of impact.

GradEL

Tony Hu opened with an overview of the program's "North Star," organized around three pillars: academics, impact, and practice. He highlighted three new courses launching during the academic year, noted that *Unpacking Impact* had become a permanent course with a dedicated number, and thanked partners OpenAI and Corning for exploring their interest in the residency program.

Tony then reviewed participation data, showing strong growth in student engagement. He noted that participation in just the current semester nearly matched full-year totals from prior years, suggesting that recent outreach efforts were effective. He highlighted increased participation from AeroAstro and EECS students, partly driven by new graduate professional development requirements and expanded course relevance. Certificate enrollments were also trending upward, though more gradually due to time-to-completion.

Turning to academics, Tony described the evolving course portfolio. New offerings included a pilot course on Personal Engineering Leadership Development led by Monica Pheiffer, a planned persuasive communication course responding to student demand led by Rachel Best, and a prototype workshop during IAP focused on engineering leadership in the age of AI led by David Niño. He also noted that *Unpacking Impact* and LP3 had been formalized, with LP3 now open to GEL students and expected to create valuable undergraduate–graduate interaction.

Monica Pheifer then reported on workshops and the residency program. She summarized strong workshop ratings, growing attendance, and evidence that workshops drove enrollment in courses and certificates. She reviewed residency outcomes, noting that all members of the first cohort had completed the program and that several residents in the second cohort had already received and accepted full-time offers. She emphasized that the residency allowed direct feedback from hiring managers on both performance and professional behavior. Monica also reviewed the third cohort applicant pool, highlighting record applications, disciplinary trends, and ongoing challenges with the six-month contiguous residency format, particularly for EECS students.

Tony concluded with updates on marketing and outreach, citing growth in mailing lists, customized workshops, a new student advisory group, and strong alumni survey response rates. Heather Kispert Hagerty then provided a fundraising update, reporting \$3.3M raised to date toward the overall goal and progress with two promising alumni prospects, including a potential six-figure gift. She also described efforts to build a corporate prospect pipeline and collaborations with the HEALS initiative to pursue joint funding opportunities.

Discussion

Art Reidel asked whether there had been conversations with the new IMES director about collaboration within HEALS and noted interest expressed at the HEALS launch. He also observed that current fundraising prospects were prior non-donors and shared his own experience re-engaging with MIT through GEL, suggesting that leadership programs could be effective tools for reconnecting non-donor alumni.

Heather Kispert Hagerty agreed, explaining that non-donors often sought meaningful engagement before giving and that GEL and GradEL provided strong opportunities for involvement. Tony Hu added examples of individuals who became engaged through workshops and later contributed or helped identify new prospects.

Dan Riccio expressed concern that the program was behind its fundraising goals and emphasized his willingness to help.

Subcommittee: Strengthening Enhanced Internship Programs

Monica Pheifer explained that its purpose was to use IAB connections to improve existing host-company partnerships and support new ones. She reviewed prior work, including synthesizing insights on impactful internships into key themes, generating and refining ideas, and identifying several low-hanging-fruit pilots. The subcommittee's current focus

was developing clear value propositions for the GEL Impactship and GradEL Engineering Residency programs.

Monica described early results from the pilots, including receiving more detailed hiring information from companies, connecting candidates with current interns for peer preparation, requiring foundational coursework for residents, and introducing structured reflection. These changes improved candidate matching, clarified expectations, and enhanced coaching and cohort learning. She also summarized guidance shared with program leadership on differentiation, such as industry mentorship, internship duration, leadership exposure, fee structures, and better alignment with hiring managers.

Rahul Saha emphasized the importance of mentoring students into industry broadly and the challenge of making a six-month internship both feasible and meaningfully different from standard internships. Art Reidel suggested introducing a fee with a first-year waiver to lower barriers, noting companies already paid for recruiting services. Monica concluded by asking for volunteers to review draft value propositions, while Reza Rahaman urged framing them around how companies could redirect existing recruiting budgets toward a program that delivered stronger candidates.

Subcommittee: Understanding Workforce and Workplace Change

Eileen Milligan reminded the group that the subcommittee's goal was to identify the skills students needed to thrive in today's engineering workplace. Members had engaged recruiters and managers to compare today's graduates with earlier generations and identified four priority challenge areas: persuasive technical communication, habits of an effective colleague, resilient project leadership, and interdisciplinary participation and facilitation.

Peter Zeeb then described how the subcommittee advanced its work by holding structured discussions with GEL and GradEL instructors and program leaders. These sessions connected industry-informed insights to specific courses and initiatives, using a two-step process of listening, reflection, and follow-up discussion. Peter emphasized that this approach helped translate broad workforce themes into actionable program improvements.

Several instructors shared how the input influenced their teaching. Jacqueline Goldstein highlighted the power of personal stories from alumni and industry leaders in helping students internalize communication best practices. Rachel Best noted that the discussions reinforced the importance of preparation and sequencing communication

skills. Monica Pheifer described using real-world examples of non-technical competencies to show students that how they work with others was as important as technical ability.

Peter also noted contributions related to hybrid work and project leadership, including ideas for preparing students for hybrid environments and the expansion of the project management course to add depth. Eileen closed by explaining that instructors would integrate these insights into their curricula and that the subcommittee would pause and reconvene after the spring semester to assess how its recommendations had strengthened the programs.

Ideas for Next Subcommittee

Eileen Milligan introduced a short discussion on possible topics for future IAB subcommittees, explaining that these were preliminary ideas generated by current members. She cited examples such as branding, hybrid work challenges for graduates, and cross-disciplinary leadership skills. Ed Trautman and Tang Tan both said they valued the subcommittee experience, with Tang noting particular interest in student branding as a future area of focus.

Reza Rahaman invited input from the full IAB, clarifying that comments did not imply a commitment to participate. Soren raised a concern about how leadership was described in earlier presentations, cautioning against treating leadership as a set of procedures rather than focusing on developing attitudes and mindsets. Reza agreed, emphasizing that leadership could not be directly taught but could be developed through a combination of skills and attitudes.

Ed Trautman added that many critical “soft skills,” such as communication and working with people, were often learned later in professional life rather than in formal education. Simon Pitts emphasized values, character, and integrity as essential components of leadership, especially when making difficult decisions. He suggested that this topic deserved focused attention separate from branding and also supported cross-disciplinary leadership as an important future subcommittee area.