Opportunity
The OSU hybrid rocket team needs assistance in developing a solid fuel for use in current and future rockets.

Objective
Formulate novel fuels, conduct subscale characterization tests for various formulations and report a recommended fuel composition.

Background
Hybrid Main Sections:
- Oxidizer: Liquid nitrous oxide (N₂O) is a self-pressurizing oxidizer for hybrid rockets
- Fuel grain: A solid, wax-based material that reacts with N₂O to produce thrust
- Nozzle: Reaction products are expelled quickly as exhaust to produce thrust

Paraffin produces a melt layer determined by the formulation’s viscosity.

Subscale Testing and Setup
Subscale tests with 8” length, 0.8” inner diameter fuel grains are performed at the OSU propulsion lab. Thrust and pressure data are obtained and used to make inferences on fuel performance.

Chemistry Background
Fuel grain components react with nitrous oxide given the following reactions for paraffin, aluminum powder, lithium aluminum hydride, and hexamine.

\[ C_{22}H_{44} + 94N_2O \rightarrow 32CO_2 + 32H_2O + 94N_2 \quad \Delta H = -66 \text{ kJ} \text{ kg}^{-1} \]

\[ 2Al + 3N_2O \rightarrow 2Al_2O_3 + 3N_2 \quad \Delta H = -36 \text{ kJ} \text{ kg}^{-1} \]

\[ 2LiAlH_4 + 8N_2O \rightarrow 8N_2 + 3H_2O + 4Al_2O_3 + 2LiOH \quad \Delta H = -50 \text{ kJ} \text{ kg}^{-1} \]

\[ C_{18}H_{34}N_2 + 6N_2O \rightarrow 20N_2 + 6CO_2 \quad \Delta H = -16 \text{ kJ} \text{ kg}^{-1} \]

LiAlH₄ is considered as an energetic additive due to its higher heat of reaction and molar production of gaseous products relative to aluminum.

Manufacturing
Paraffin (fuel base) and additive compositions are weighed out and mixed in metal tins until homogenous. The contents are then poured into casting tubes and spun at 360 rpm. A spin cast prototype was manufactured to speed up manufacturing times.

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PROJECT SPONSOR
OSU American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics

PROJECT STATUS
The team will conduct additional subscale tests to evaluate the effect of viscosity on performance and test LiAlH₄ with a cornstarch binder.

Impulse [N·s]: Defined as a change in momentum, proportional to rocket altitude.

Specific Impulse [s]: \( I_p \), average thrust divided by mass flow rate.

\[ I_p = \frac{\text{Thrust}_{avg}}{g \left( \dot{m}_\text{ex} + \dot{m}_\text{fuel} \right)} \]

Iₚ = 129 s
Impulse = 423 N·s

Figure 1: Standard hybrid rocket propulsion system with oxidizer tank, fuel grain, and exhaust nozzle.

Figure 2: Melt layer diagram of the liquid solid interface.

Figure 3: Sub-scale testing setup includes a nitrous holding tank as well as the subscale motor on the thrust sled.

Figure 4: A rendition of the motor tube with important components labeled.

Figure 5: Melted wax with hexamine. Melting and mixing of components were done in a fume hood.

Figure 6: Spin casting system developed for fuel grain manufacturing.

Figure 7: Finished fuel grain after spin casting and casting tube after a subscale test combustion.

Figure 8: The thrust curve given by the load cell (shown in Figure 5) for the composition of 25% Al, 10% cornstarch, 2% carbon black, 63% paraffin.

Impulse [N·s]: Defined as a change in momentum, proportional to rocket altitude.