



## Fall Bulletin 2001

<http://gsc.stanford.edu>

### *Dear fellow graduate student,*

It's nice to see you all again at the Farm - well, hopefully some of us graduated this summer: Congratulations to them! All grads that remain, please join me in a warm welcome to all the new students that have decided to make Stanford their home for the next few years.

Our aim at the GSC is to make Stanford a place that truly feels like home. We strive to have a graduate community rich in social and cultural activities, where everyone feels welcome and appreciated. We advocate for higher stipends and better living conditions, so that each student can afford decent housing and quality health care. We believe that if these elements are in place, completing our graduate education will be easier and much more rewarding. We are counting on you to help us achieve these goals. As usual, we invite all interested students to participate in our regular meetings (*Wednesdays, 6pm at Bechtel*) and to give us feedback by e-mailing [gsc@assu.stanford.edu](mailto:gsc@assu.stanford.edu)

The summer period was full of events of concern to graduate students, notably housing and health insurance. We also had an excellent and well attended 4th of July barbecue. All of these and many more issues and events coming up in the Fall quarter are reported in this Bulletin. More information can be found at our web-site:

<http://gsc.stanford.edu/>

On behalf of the GSC, I wish you all the best for the coming school year,

*Filipe Santos, GSC Chair*

*PhD Student in Management Science & Engineering*

### **What can we do for you this Fall?**

In Spring quarter, fifteen GSC members were officially elected by the graduate student body for the academic year 2001/02. Five of them are members at large, the others are representatives of the different districts. - But one doesn't have to be officially elected to become an influential member of the GSC. The GSC makes decisions by consensus and anyone who is willing to share their opinion (by attending our meetings or by contacting our elected representatives) will have their voice heard. For a complete list of the current members of the GSC (both officially elected and informal) please take a look at

[http://gsc.stanford.edu/gsc\\_membership.htm](http://gsc.stanford.edu/gsc_membership.htm)

Our overarching goal is to improve the quality of graduate stu-

dent life at Stanford. To achieve this goal we are active in three main areas:

#### **Advocacy**

The GSC is the political representative of the graduate student body. We try to promote the interest of graduate students and improve the quality of graduate life at Stanford by addressing critical issues such as stipend levels, housing, health care, and childcare. If you want to raise a specific issue for advocacy, please email us at [gsc@assu.stanford.edu](mailto:gsc@assu.stanford.edu)

#### **Funding**

The GSC oversees the distribution of funding from the quarterly student activity fees and supports the activities of student groups all over campus. Last year, we funded a wide range of social, educational, community service, and cultural events that were open to the whole graduate student population. For a complete listing of the groups that recently received GSC support, please take a look at

[http://gsc.stanford.edu/gsc\\_funding\\_groups\\_events.htm](http://gsc.stanford.edu/gsc_funding_groups_events.htm)

If you are a member of a graduate group and are interested in this opportunity, please check out the GSC funding policies at [http://gsc.stanford.edu/gsc\\_funding.htm](http://gsc.stanford.edu/gsc_funding.htm) or email the Funding Committee Chair at [gsc-fcc@assu.stanford.edu](mailto:gsc-fcc@assu.stanford.edu)

#### **Social Events**

In addition to the financial support that we provide for student groups, we also organize several major events throughout the year. The 4<sup>th</sup> of July Barbecue and the upcoming Thanksgiving Dinner have traditionally been very successful. We also co-sponsor smaller parties and organize the quarterly Grad Night at Flicks - Stanford's Sunday night movie tradition. We also work closely with the Graduate Student Programming Board (GSPB) to co-organize many other events (check out the GSPB update on pg.2)

As the president and vice-president of the ASSU, we are excited and honored to represent the needs of both graduate and undergraduate students for the upcoming school year. We applaud the efforts of the GSC and will work to ensure implementation of its past victories. Furthermore, we look forward to working together to improve issues that affect both graduate and undergraduate students, such as transportation, faculty diversity, and advocacy for the arts. We also are excited to work with the GSC on more fundamental issues that are essential to the well-being of Stanford's graduate students, such as housing, stipends, and health care. Please know that your vision has a resource in the ASSU.

*Matthew Brewer, ASSU President*

*Christine Cordero, ASSU Vice-President*

## The Health Care of Stanford Students and their Families is at Stake!

Filipe Santos, GSC Chair

Stanford University has regularly offered a health insurance plan for student families, covering both spouses and children. These plans have traditionally been very costly but provided a reasonable coverage under an HMO type of plan (managed care through a primary care physician). Last year, a student with a spouse and two children would pay \$3692 per year just to cover health insurance premiums, which is close to 20% of an average student stipend.

This year, Cowell Student Health Services announced in late June an estimated increase in the cost for family plans of more than 50%. To make the situation worse, Stanford Hospital and Clinics, where most families received health care, announced that they would exit the managed care business, forcing Cowell to negotiate new PPO plans with Health Net, the insurance provider. These negotiations were happening less than two months before the current plan was terminated. Given the delays in securing a new plan, Cowell provided alternative information about public insurance programs for children and pregnant women.

The Graduate Student Council had been following this situation with great concern since March. We met several times with university officials and asked for a commitment towards family health insurance. As late as early July, there had been no commitment towards helping families and no alternative insurance plan had been finalized. It is important to note that the health care system in the US is oriented towards employer plans, where the employer contributes to the cost of the health insurance and pools risks across the employee base. It is usually less costly to insure students, given the large pool and low need for health care. In comparison, student families have higher health care needs and it is hard to find reasonable alternatives in the insurance market. By not supporting family health insurance, the University leaves students in a very difficult situation. This is especially true for international students (who have specific insurance requirements due to immigration laws), and students with family members who have pre-existing medical conditions or require ongoing treatments.

The change in healthcare plans lead to an overwhelming response from the graduate student population. The GSC received more than one hundred poignant e-mails from both single students and students with families. We also recorded several video messages describing life-threatening situations that would be aggravated by a cancellation or significant cost increase of the health plan. Given the importance and urgency of this issue - the health of our student families was at stake - the GSC launched a large awareness campaign in mid-July, both internally at Stanford, and to the community.

One week after we started this campaign, Cowell finalized agreements for a PPO plan with Health Net. Unfortunately, the new plan is not only much more costly, but it will also reduce the level of coverage and increase the out-of-pocket expenses. Given the raised awareness about the seriousness of this situation, the University announced the allocation of one-time resources to support family health insurance. As a result, the rates will increase by 16% for spouses and 23% for children.

The bottom line is that student families will receive worse health insurance at a much higher cost this year. A student with spouse and children will now pay \$4300 for health insurance per year. As this would take up close to 25% (!) of the average student stipend, it cannot be considered an affordable option.

We believe that Stanford has a responsibility towards the health

insurance of students and families, given that the market for health insurance does not provide affordable alternatives. Doctoral students for example, usually study, teach and do research full-time in the University, for a period of four to eight years, which is longer than the turnover rate of many Stanford employees. In addition, our stipends usually place us in the very low income bracket, making any market solutions simply unaffordable. The current health insurance situation is extremely bad for student families and will likely get worse. In addition, increases in premiums will probably also affect single student health plans as early as next year. Stanford needs to create a health insurance policy that demonstrates a commitment to improve this situation. We would like to work with the University administration in order to discuss and find solutions that enable graduate students to afford reasonable quality health care.

## Grad Student Programming Board - News

Elizabeth Marin - Co-Chair, Graduate Student Programming Board  
PhD Student in Biological Sciences

The Graduate Student Programming Board is a volunteer student group dedicated to building graduate student community through campus-wide events. Our goal is to increase opportunities for cross-departmental and cross-cultural interactions among graduate students by organizing, sponsoring, and coordinating social and educational activities open to the entire graduate population.

This past spring, we co-sponsored a salsa lesson and dance party with Salsa! as well as a Heaven and Hell themed dance party with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender Community Resource Center. Our traditional Fourth of July BBQ, an enormously popular event co-sponsored by the GSC, drew over five hundred people for free food and fun in the sun. And over the summer, when few student groups were organizing social events, we held biweekly activities nights in Hacienda Commons so that folks could enjoy some snacks and drinks while playing games, making crafts, or watching movies with their fellow graduate students.

In the coming year, we hope to coordinate more activities with other student organizations and will be holding regular planning meetings with representatives from the GSC, the residential CAs, and other groups such as the Black Graduate Student Association and the Graduate Women's Network.

Want to find out more about the GSPB? Please visit our website, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/gspb> which contains contact info, more information on past events, helpful grad life links, and a calendar for planned events and equipment rentals.

Most importantly, it is the input and energy of the student body that determines the success of our events! If you would like to participate in graduate student programming, send an email to [majordomo@lists.stanford.edu](mailto:majordomo@lists.stanford.edu) with "subscribe gradprogram" in the body and we will inform you about upcoming activities. You are also welcome to attend our weekly meetings, currently *Mondays at noon in Bechtel International Center*. Please join us!

### Upcoming GSC/GSPB Events in Fall Quarter

Fall quarter will be kicked off with a *Midnight BBQ*, to be followed by a *Halloween Party* and our traditional GSC/GSPB co-sponsored *Thanksgiving Dinner*. We would also like to organize some *winter break social activities* for those graduate students who plan to remain on campus, culminating in a *New Year's Eve Party* that will be open to all.

**Stay tuned to our mailing lists!**

### Mentoring Program for Women in Science

The Association for Women in Science (AWIS) offers a mentoring program for women graduate students in science and engineering at Stanford University. The program will help to overcome difficulties such as isolation and lack of feedback by providing a supportive mentor to reveal new options and boost morale. Each participating student will be paired with a local woman scientist/engineer. *First meeting: Wed. Oct. 17, 7-9 pm; RSVP fong-yih.bin@menlo.ppdi.com by Oct. 12 More info: [http://www.pa-awis.org/activities/Mentoring/ment\\_protege.htm](http://www.pa-awis.org/activities/Mentoring/ment_protege.htm)*

## GSC Report on Housing

*Stijn Van Nieuwerburgh, Elizabeth Marin, Filipe Santos*

The shortage of affordable housing continues to be a very serious problem for graduate students at Stanford. The 2001 housing lottery results were the worst ever - 1350 graduate students who applied for on-campus housing did not get assigned. Since housing is guaranteed for all 1st year students, about half of continuing student applicants lost the housing lottery. The GSC has been working hard to address this crisis.

The off-campus subsidized program was again an essential element of the university housing system. Thanks to our advocacy efforts and the generous support from the university, this program expanded from 700 to about 1000 units, enabling students that lost the lottery the opportunity to rent off-campus apartments through Stanford at lower than market rates. As a way to increase the stability of the housing system, students currently in the off-campus subsidized program were offered a chance to renew their contracts, thus making the housing lottery odds better for everyone else. This housing program should be continued in the coming years, creating a stable and affordable housing alternative, given the shortage of on-campus housing.

In addition to the off-campus subsidized housing program, the GSC advocated for a new housing stipend program to which the University allocated \$1M. The recommendation of the Graduate Housing Advisory Committee was to provide a \$250 monthly check to help 333 lower income students face the adverse off-campus housing market. All students who were not assigned on-campus or off-campus subsidized housing were eligible, and participation in the May lottery was not required. A total of 962 students applied to this program and the first 166 eligible students were randomly chosen at the end of July. In early August, President Hennessy decided to offer the remaining eligible students who applied to the program an alternative of a guaranteed \$100, and allocated an additional \$150,000 to make this solution possible. In the end, 189 stipends of \$250 and 478 stipends of \$100 were allocated. The effectiveness of this pilot program will be reviewed during the current year. A \$100 subsidy is clearly insufficient to guarantee a reasonable quality of life off-campus on an average student income. The GSC will advocate for a meaningful housing support from the University, made available to all eligible students.

The subsidy programs described above were intended as short term remedies while new on-campus housing was being built. Construction started this summer on two new studio buildings in Escondido Village. These buildings should be ready in October and December of 2002, adding 326 net single student beds.

However, the current on-campus housing deficit is over 1600 units, so these new units are clearly insufficient to address the housing shortage. The University administration has stated repeatedly that building new graduate housing is its top priority, and planned to build 1900 new graduate housing units in the next 10 years. Unfortunately, this

stated priority has not been turned into a concrete commitment. The new capital plan, approved by the Board of Trustees in June, delayed by several years the already planned construction of more than 700 new units, and it seems that, with the probable exception of a new Law School Housing Quad that will house 190 students, no new graduate housing will be built before 2006.

The University justified this delay on the grounds that it is reaching its debt limit for capital investments and it is difficult to raise donations for graduate housing. While this may be true, the GSC believes that the University could do more to speed construction of new housing. The identification of graduate housing as a top priority needs to be translated into concrete actions. We perceive the housing crisis as the major threat to the quality of life and work of Stanford graduate students.

In the current year, the priority of the GSC Housing team will be to advocate for on-campus housing construction. We will continue to discuss with the University administration ways of making the housing situation better for graduate students. Towards this end, we will conduct a Quality of Life survey in the Fall, reaching all graduate students, to find out more about your housing needs and current living conditions. This information will be crucial for improving the housing alternatives available to graduate students. Stay tuned for further developments!

For more information on the housing situation go to:

[http://gsc.stanford.edu/gsc\\_housing.htm](http://gsc.stanford.edu/gsc_housing.htm)

If you want to help in our advocacy efforts please contact us at: [gsc@assu.stanford.edu](mailto:gsc@assu.stanford.edu)

### Move your body, free your mind!

Stanford Aerobics is a graduate student organization that offers fitness and wellness classes for Stanford community and friends. We teach Yoga, STEP, Nia, Kickbox and many other favorites. Classes are offered daily and are taught by qualified instructors at a minimal fee. See for yourself, there is something for everyone. *Learn more at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/aerobics/>*

## New GSC Focus Groups

In the past, focus groups within the GSC have been successful in addressing important issues such as housing or healthcare. These focus groups meet separately to come up with concrete goals and suggestions for the GSC. They also report back and receive input at the weekly GSC meetings.

In the upcoming Fall quarter the GSC would like to form new focus groups in a number of different target areas. We would like to establish groups that address *child care issues* (e.g. costs, availability), *international student issues* (e.g. INS problems, intercultural issues), and the situation of *graduate students of color* (e.g. recruitment, availability of resources). Also, we would like to contribute to a *wellness network* for graduate students.

These focus groups depend on the commitment of their members. If you are interested in any of these issues email [gsc@assu.stanford.edu](mailto:gsc@assu.stanford.edu) or come to our weekly meetings.

### Get the message out!

Would you like to announce an event that may be of interest to other graduate students? You can now post it on the GSC graduate student events list. For more details just go to:

[http://gsc.stanford.edu/gsc\\_grad\\_events/groups.htm](http://gsc.stanford.edu/gsc_grad_events/groups.htm)

**Boost your social life!**

- Would you like to receive weekly updates about upcoming social events for graduate students?
- Email [majordomo@lists.stanford.edu](mailto:majordomo@lists.stanford.edu) and write “subscribe grad-events” in the body of the email.

**Complete the GSC Survey!**

In October we will conduct a large scale Quality of Life Survey to better understand the needs, concerns, and living conditions of graduate students.  
*Please reply to the survey!*



subscribe to [phd.stanford.edu](http://phd.stanford.edu)

by Jorge Cham

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