

The Grad News

The Newsletter of the Hopkins/Homewood
Graduate Community

Volume 2
Issue 3

December
2000

24 Hours of GRO: The GRO Online

The *Grad News*, The *GRO Guide to Living in Baltimore*, The Grad Forum, all online. See page 6 for details.

Or Face-to-Face:

Coffee-Social Hour

Mondays at 3 in the Gilman lobby for free coffee

Happy Hour

Tuesdays from 6 to 9 at PJ's Pub for cheap drinks and free food

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Health Insurance—We Need Your Input!

Now that much of the hullabaloo has evened out, we need to step back and consider the options open to graduate students in the upcoming health insurance bidding process. Graduate students on the Johns Hopkins Homewood campus are required (by university policy) to carry health insurance. The university provides a plan available to all students (at Homewood, SAIS, School of Nursing, or Peabody) that is developed by a committee made up of representatives from each of these "stakeholders." If a student does not wish to

purchase this policy and maintains a similar level of coverage (e.g., they may be covered in a spouse's or parent's policy), they can choose to waive the policy. For the last several years, the company underwriting the Johns Hopkins plan is the MEGA Life and Health Insurance Company (MEGA Life). Over the last year, MEGA Life has done a poor job of upholding its side of the contract. Largely as a result of these problems, the health insurance policy contract will be put out for a bid for the first time in several years.

One always approaches the re-negotiation of a contract with some trepidation. While there are opportunities for gains (e.g., a modicum of customer service), there also exists the risk for losses (e.g., we will likely see insurance costs rise more than 3% this year). So, putting the contract out for bid is not a decision that has been made without some consideration.

A relatively quick and simple analysis of insurance companies shows that MEGA Life is extraordinary in their customer service (and I don't mean ex-

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WGS Status Impacts Grads and JHU Community

Negotiations on the status and structure of the Women, Gender and Sexuality Program (WGS), which have been taking place for much of this semester, reached an impasse this month, culminating in the resignation of the WGS Advisory Board. The WGS program has been without a director since late August. On November 6, the

WGS Advisory Board presented its resignation statement to the Dean of the School of Art & Sciences, citing a "crisis of succession" regarding the hiring of a new program director. The resignation summary also notes disagreements with the Dean over administrative stability.

The WGS program gives graduate students and

faculty a forum for interdisciplinary intellectual and career development. WGS is probably best known for offering a substantive minor field for undergraduates, but also enhances the work of graduate students and faculty in many departments. Since its inception in 1990, WGS has created its own

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Restaurant Review

Tamber's has something for everyone.

Having trouble agreeing on a restaurant? You want Italian, your friend is craving Indian, and your sister, visiting for the weekend, just wants a good home-cooked meal – nothing fancy for her tonight, thank you. Tamber's is just the place. It offers up a menu that never seems to end. Add to the aforementioned categories dinner salads, hotdogs, hamburgers, sandwiches, and traditional steak and chicken entrees. (Note to vegetarians: You're best bet is to stick to the Indian portion of the menu. Elsewhere, the pickings are disappointingly slim.) And then there is the selection of appetizers, fountain sodas and shakes, ice cream, and homemade desserts. And, I almost forgot, the weekend brunch

menu. (Whew, did I get it all?) The prices are reasonable: Appetizers are in the \$4 - \$5 range, entrees range from about \$4 to \$14, and desserts hover around \$2.75.

Though the menu is varied, the décor is decidedly one style – that of a 50's diner. A colorful (and free) jukebox glows beneath the silver mirrored ceiling, and customers can enjoy framed prints of retro cars from their bright red booths. The service is fast and friendly, like any good diner in Baltimore, hon. And don't pass up the chance to order a drink from the soda fountain. A cherry coke provides a refreshing accompaniment to the task of perusing that lengthy menu!

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Tamber's Nifty-Fifties Restaurant Soda Fountain

3327 St. Paul Street
Take-out/Delivery
Phone: (410) 243-0383
Fax: (410) 243-0478

Mon-Thur 10 am to 10 pm
Fri-Sat 9 am to 11 pm
Sun 9 am to 9 pm

Take-out and (limited) delivery available. \$8 minimum required for delivery.

Something good for everyone!

AT THE MOVIES:

Charlie's Angels

Back in the '70s, before Madonna, Girl Power and Brandy Chastain, where did America's children turn for role models of women who were professionally successful, hip, fit and sexy? Why, to Charlie's Angels, of course. Now you can relive those happy days of youth, when all problems could be solved with a karate chop, a flip of the hair, and a painfully bad pun.

The recently released Charlie's Angels movie, starring Drew Barrymore, Cameron Diaz, and Lucy Liu, is absolutely delightful. It has all the good qualities of the TV series: improbable fight scenes, lots of derring-do, exotic locations around L.A., feathered haircuts (Cameron Diaz's is particularly excellent), lots of lip gloss, and pink-tinted sunglasses. The only bad things I can say about the movie is that Bill Murray is in

it, and that Matrix-style fight scenes are now so common as to be clichéd (though these are as much parody as homage).

One of the best elements of the movie is how it combines aspects of the '70s with the '90s and '00s (I'm leaning towards pronouncing that "aughty-aughts," but just to be difficult). The plot revolves around the kidnapping of a computer tycoon, obviously modeled on Bill Gates. Yet many scenes involve fashions and haircuts not seen in these parts for nigh on 20 years, and at least one Angel fantasizes about being able to dance like they used to in Saturday Night Fever. It's almost as if the real plot of the movie is a moral lesson in how the spirit of the '70s could save us from ourselves, how an ethos of carefree exuberance could reanimate a society grown too serious—too

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Charlie's Angels

Give your brain a break!

WGS Program at an Impasse

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speaker, seminar and brown bag lunch series, as well as organized both an annual day-long workshop (where graduate students present original work) and the campus-wide celebration of Women's History Month.

A prepared statement of "Graduate Concerns for the Future of WGS at Johns Hopkins" highlights worries that the uncertain status of WGS negatively impacts intellectual development, recruitment and retention of both faculty and students, and graduate student teaching opportunities. History of Medicine student Manon Parry recognizes the unification gender studies brings to her work, as well as WGS' influence on her decision to attend Johns Hopkins. "History of Medicine usually shares students and resources from history, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, religious or cultural studies departments. It would be especially useful for me to have demonstrable training in gender studies as it is such an important part of all these research areas."

Other graduate students speak highly of how WGS' commitment to interdisciplinary work has augmented their individual research projects, as well as increased their job prospects.

Kathy Trevenen, a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science, has served as WGS Graduate Liaison and is cur-

rently the WGS Prize Teaching Fellow for her course, "Women, the Nation, and Cosmopolitanism." She notes that, "WGS is one of the best settings for interdisciplinary work. It brings together faculty and graduate students in a unique setting for intellectual development. Since it is not linked to any single department, it attracts a diverse group of graduate students and allows them to share their work across disciplinary boundaries in a way that doesn't happen often in academia. And by sponsoring events like Women's History Month, it not only raises the visibility of important issues, but also offers social settings in which students, faculty and interested community members can meet while developing common interests."

Rachel Ablow, who received her Ph.D. in Victorian Literature from the English department and is now Visiting Assistant Professor at University of Rochester, explains that her experience with WGS had a positive influence on her job search. Prospective employers noted her service as graduate liaison and as a teacher of her own courses. "[Departments] could look at my experience and know that I brought an interest in women's and gender studies to my research and teaching. At the same time, I know there were some [women's studies] positions that I was disqualified from because I had not done enough course work in gender and sexuality studies. It seems to

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Tamber's Nifty-Fifties Diner

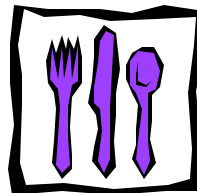
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Though it feels a bit odd to order Indian food in a restaurant where service on roller skates would barely raise an eyebrow, that is what my two companions and I decided to do. I began my meal with a samosa, which was good but not scrumptious. The pastry was crunchy and cooked to perfection, but the potato filling didn't deliver quite the punch that I was craving. After this slightly disappointing start, I was pleasantly surprised by the main entrées. I had the chicken tika masala, and my friends had chicken curry and saag meat. Each dish was served with rice and raita (a cool and refreshing cucumber sauce), and we topped it all off with two orders of naan (bread) to share. The smooth, creamy, sauce of my dish was draped over tender and moist pieces of chicken. It was almost heavenly! My companions were delighted with their dishes as well. We finished our meal by splitting a decadent piece of chocolate cake—

complete with three layers of cake, two frostings, and a layer of cherries nestled inside.

I must admit that though the food was surprisingly good, there was a hint of disappointment lingering over my dining experience. Given the grad student budget, going out to dinner is treat to be savored. I realized that part of the feeling of craving Indian food, for me anyway, is also craving the rich experience of eating in an Indian restaurant. The dim lighting, soft background music, and décor are enjoyed almost as much as the tantalizing spices in the food. So if you too feel the need for harmony between your entrée and the ambiance,

perhaps you had better stick with a cheeseburger and fries!



Linda S. Bedsaul
Philosophy Department

Insurance Input Requested

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traordinarily good). The most common technique used for analysis of an insurance company is called the “complaint index.” Each state government tracks the amount of insurance sold by each provider and the number of complaints against each provider in a particular state (while complaint indices are generated for all types of insurance, for the remainder of this article we will only discuss health insurance). The complaint index is determined by running the data through a relatively simple set of calculations. First, the company’s “market share” is determined by dividing the amount of insurance sold by that particular company by the amount of all insurance sold in the state. The number of complaints (and in many cases these are complaints “justified” upon examination by state officials) lodged against a certain company divided by the total number of complaints lodged in a state gives you a “complaint share.” To arrive at a “complaint index,” one simply divides the complaint share by the market share. In a perfect world, all complaint indexes should be zero (as insurance companies would all be so good that there would never be a complaint against them). In our world, the complaint index really should be, on average, one. This is because a company expects to receive a portion of complaints close to the portion of the market they insure.

This is where MEGA Life’s astonishing numbers emerge. Not all states maintain “complaint indexes” that are publicly accessible via the internet. For this analysis, we are limited to those that do. We have examined Connecticut, Indiana, Missouri, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Texas. In all of the years and states with data (Oregon doesn’t list MEGA Life and Connecticut lists it as part of a larger group of companies) examined here, MEGA Life only falls below a complaint index of 3.00 once (in 1997

in Pennsylvania). This clearly shows that MEGA Life is receiving complaints far above and beyond that which they should based on their market share.

The abominable customer service, compounded with the back-of-the-envelope calculations below, have prompted the Student Health Insurance Committee to place the contract up for bid this semester. Think of the tradeoffs between policy price and customer service in the following terms: We are paid as half-time employees. Assuming a stipend of \$15 thousand, we really should be expecting an hourly wage of at least \$15. The most recent change in the prescription plan (i.e., movement from an Rx card to a reimbursement system) saved each person who purchased a premium about \$75. That means that if the average student has to spend more than 5 hours on MEGA Life paper pushing, all of the students lose real compensation. I imagine that all students on monthly prescriptions are currently losing, even if the claims process is flawless on the MEGA Life end. If it isn’t, as any of you who have been sent into voicemail orbit know, the student is definitely losing.

So this all is very cheery. We are likely to see a cost increase in insurance next year (the trends for 2001 insurance costs point to a percentage increase roughly 1.5 times that of 2000, without a change in provider.) If we expect better customer service, the costs are likely to increase even more dramatically. We really need your input on this question: are you willing to pay extra for adequate customer service? Please contact the graduate student representatives on the Student Health Insurance Committee (Ann Stewart and me) directly via email dbain@jhu.edu, stewart@math.jhu.edu. Thanks.

We need your input!

This is your opportunity to influence the health insurance we graduate students will receive in upcoming years. The insurance bidding process begins early next semester.

Tell us what you are willing to sacrifice, what you would like to see added, whether you can afford premium increases, or whatever else is on your mind.

Contact ASAP:

Dan Bain, dbain@jhu.edu
Ann Stewart, stewart@math.jhu.edu

Dan Bain
GRO Insurance Committee

WGS Program at an Impasse

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me what needs to happen is not a dismantling of the program, but a fortification of it.”

Associate Dean Steven David and sources within WGS say that the main point of disagreement is the hiring of the new director. The former WGS Advisory Board has asked for a multidepartmental external search for a senior-level faculty member, who would teach within a department and also direct WGS. The Dean’s Office stresses that the Hopkins tradition has been that the leadership of interdepartmental programs makes use of interested faculty within the university and would prefer that an existing member of the faculty step forward to direct WGS. The Dean’s office has said it would use its influence with departments to work on augmenting existing searches to also provide a director for WGS. The WGS program, says Dean David, “provides a critical contribution to intellectual life at the university,” and the Dean’s Office is committed to seeing the program continue and do well.

The resignation statement of the WGS Board has expressed their dissatisfaction with the solutions offered by the Dean’s office. Noting the underrepresentation in the faculty of women and scholars for whom WGS would be an area of expertise, the WGS Board argues that there are simply not enough qualified individuals from among whom a director could “step forward.” The Board also

notes that the appointment of the program’s first director, Professor Judith Walkowitz (History), came about through precisely the kind of multidepartmental search requested now. The Board argues that a multidepartmental search would induce departments to hire with the needs of WGS in mind, allow departments to consider adding an additional faculty member, and encourage a wider range of WGS candidates and program participants.

Student reactions to the possible dissolution of the WGS program have included the presentation of a 1000-name petition in support of WGS, a letter-writing campaign to the university administration, and a resolution by the undergraduate Student Council in support of WGS’ continuance.

As of press-time for this article, the Provost had called a meeting with the Dean’s Office and former WGS Advisory Board in an attempt to resolve the issues between them. The meeting was to take place on November 30. As more information becomes available, the *Grad News* will report updates on the status of the WGS program.

To join the “Friends of WGS” mailing list, interested students and faculty should email Emily Wentzell at ewentzell@hotmail.com.

Erin Ackerman
Political Science

AT THE MOVIES:

Charlie’s Angels

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concerned with its health to enjoy Shake-n-Bake, too eager to get ahead to be here now, too much obsessed with silicon to enjoy some time on the sand.

Another point in the movie’s favor, for those of us who like movies of all types, is the observation made by my colleague Mr. Blake Ethridge: *Charlie’s Angels*, like *X-Men*, is a movie that has no pretensions. Just as *X-Men* knew it was a comic-book come to life, *Charlie’s Angels* knows that it is a cheesy TV-show magically transported to the big screen. This means that it delivers exactly what it promises, and you leave the theater feeling contented that you got your money’s worth. Maybe it’s just me, but I’m happy to hear silly dialogue and follow fanciful plots so long as I knew beforehand that that’s what I was sign-

ing up for, and the film-makers take seriously their duty to provide exactly that.

I’d be curious to know what those not old enough to have watched the original show in its heyday think about the movie. The main danger, I think, is that they would not realize that the show was already quite tongue-in-cheek, even before the movie dared the impossible by parodying a parody. To my mind, the beauty of *Charlie’s Angels* was not that it showed the silliness of much of the ‘70s, but that it did so lovingly. The underlying message was never “this is stupid,” but “this is stupid; let’s do it anyway.” And that is why you should go see it.

Matthew Moore
Political Science

The Graduate Representative Organization

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Something Old, Something New

GRO Guide Online

Your favorite source for restaurant reviews, tips on navigating the administration, and outdoor fun is now online: www.jhu.edu/gro/guide/home.htm

Grad News Online

Catch previous issues of the *Grad News* online at www.jhu.edu/gro/gradnews/

The Grad Forum

Post a wanted ad, sound off about your latest passion, make a hot date, or just see what other grad students are up to. Link to the Grad Forum from the GRO website: www.jhu.edu/gro/

Coffee Hour

Every Monday from 3 to 4 pm in the Gilman Hall Coffee Bar. Free coffee and good company.

Happy Hour

Every Tuesday night at PJ's Pub. Bass and Guinness pints for \$2, and FREE food.

All of the above are sponsored by the GRO.

Have a terrific holiday season!

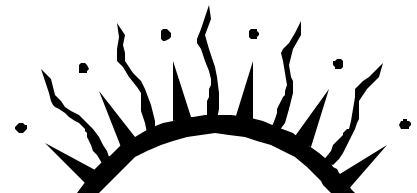
You say Goodbye, and I say Hello

The *Grad News* is sad to say goodbye to Shelly Brett-Major, devoted GRO Office Manager of 2 years. Shelly has just completed her Master's Degree in Environmental Engineering, and hopes in the near future to start a business in the haunted attraction industry.

In her place, we are pleased to welcome Erin Ackerman of Political Science. You can catch Erin's class act in the WGS Program article in this issue, or in last month's restaurant review.

Ombuds on my Mind

The non-update on the ombuds situation (see the October issue of the *Grad News*—paper or online version—for background information) is simply that nothing has changed. The latest news from Provost Steven Knapp is that the faculty person under consideration for the Ombudsperson position decided whether to accept the offer. *Stay tuned...*



**See your name
in lights!**

Er, perhaps not in lights, but you can light up the graduate community with your flashy writing style!



Writers Wanted

If you would like to write for the *Grad News* now or in the future, please contact the editor (mberk@jhu.edu).