

The Grad News

The Newsletter of the Hopkins/Homewood
Graduate Community

Volume 2
Issue 2
November
2000

Insurance Update

GRO Coffee Hour: Mondays in Gilman!

Take a mid-day
break! Join us for
FREE coffee,
snacks, and conver-
sation every Mon-
day from 3 to 4 in
the Gilman Coffee
Shop.

Sponsored by the
Graduate Represen-
tative Organization.

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This summer and fall have been marked with a flurry of activity surrounding the issue of graduate student health insurance at the Hopkins Homewood Campus. There are many issues and players. At this point, the GRO really needs to take care of some thank you notes. I'd like to organize them according to issue.

Payment of Student Health Insurance Pre-Tax:

This idea (though deceiv-
ingly seductive) is just not
going to work. The first en-

emy is us. There are many
different stipend funding
mechanisms and a significant
portion of these mechanisms
(i.e., those paying students on
fellowships) cannot pay insur-
ance on a pre-tax basis
(because these students tech-
nically do not receive money
from the university.) If the
university attempted to pay
insurance pre-tax for every-
one else, these fellows would
cry foul, asking for similar
compensation for themselves.

Even if all the students
on fellowships took one for
the team, the university be-

lieves that the IRS dictates
that if students are considered
"career employees" (one
measure being reception of
certain pre-tax benefits) they
must pay FICA (Social Secu-
rity and Medicare taxes).
FICA shaves approximately 8
percent from our salaries.
Insurance, when paid pre-tax,
saves about 1-2% of our sala-
ries. So, in order to gain pre-
tax health insurance benefits,
we would have to give up
much more lucrative tax
benefits.

The final reason that the

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Thanks to RAUL

Remote Access is at Your Fingertips

Until now, internet access to
the JHU library's vast re-
sources has been limited to
those using JHU Internet Pro-
tocol (IP) addresses. This
means that if you were not on
a university computer or us-
ing JHU-Connect as your
internet service provider
(ISP), you were unable to ac-
cess such treasures as J-Stor,
Project MUSE, or other sub-
scription-only services.

Through its collaboration
with Enterprise Services
Group, Johns Hopkins Uni-

versity now allows all current
student, faculty, and staff with
active library privileges to
access electronically almost
all electronic library re-
sources, regardless of their
ISP. RAUL, JHU's Remote
Access to University Librar-
ies, acts as a mediator be-
tween non-university IP ad-
resses and JHU's network.
After a simple registration
service, requiring only your J-
Card, PIN (last four digits of
your Social Security number),
and email address, you can

quickly be searching through
electronic journals or reserv-
ing material from any Hop-
kins library.

Among the privileges of
membership are access to da-
tabases and journals from
Welch, MSE, SAIS, and
Friedheim Libraries.

Through testing, Net-
scape Navigator (4.5, 4.6, or
4.7) has proven to be the most
reliable browser for using
RAUL. If you do not have

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From checking out other reviews of Helen's Garden, I have learned that Helen's has been raved about in the *Baltimore Sun*, called a "Best Buy" by Zagat's, and named to the *City Paper's* "Best of Baltimore 1999." My own dining experience at Helen's was pleasant and interesting, though I cannot recommend it with the same unconditional enthusiasm as did the *Sun* or the *City Paper*.

Helen's appears to be a converted row house, with a small bar area downstairs and several small dining rooms upstairs. The atmosphere is cozy and unpretentious, and the staff is very friendly and responsive. Although it was a Saturday night and pretty busy, we waited no longer than ten minutes for a table, even without reservations. (I'm told it gets much busier as the night goes on and would recommend reservations for those planning to visit on a Friday or Saturday night.)

The dinner and luncheon menus at Helen's offer variety, mostly "American" dishes with some Asian- and Greek-inspired twists to them. There are a number of standard menu options featuring seafood, which is purchased fresh daily, and many of the specials were also seafood dishes. Helen's also offers a decent selection of vegetarian, poultry, and red meat entrees. Dinner is a bit on the pricey side, ranging anywhere from thirteen to twenty-seven dollars. On Saturdays, however, Helen's offers most of its large lunch menu (read: cheaper food), featuring "big fat" burgers and sandwiches, until closing time. Especially worth noting are Helen's dinner specials (\$10 Wednesdays and \$9.95 Thursdays) which include most of the dinner menu. Brunch is served on both Saturday and Sundays.

The restaurant's wine and beer menu is extensive (though not inexpensive) and the

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Helen's Garden Restaurant

2908 O'Donnell Street
(Canton)

410-276-2233

Tue-Th 11:30 am to 10 pm

Fri 11:30 am to 11 pm

Sat 10 am to 11 pm

Sun 10:30 am to 2:30 pm

Reliable, Friendly,
Varied, Good-But-
Not-Great

. . . . and a Movie

Attention: Movie-snob and high-brow critics, please move on.

Meet the Parents inspired a unique feeling in this moviegoer—somewhere between the actual stomach-twisting, fist-clenching nausea of the Mall of America rollercoaster and the anticipatory anxiety one feels, waiting in line, trying to calculate the minimum rest-period required between ingestion of 2 bags of mini-doughnuts and rollercoaster take-off. Maybe it's just me.

Gary Focker (Ben Stiller), the likable, zany male nurse, masters his anxiety on his way to meet the parents of his fiancée-to-be, who live in suburban WASPish tranquility. Pam's father (Robert DeNiro) is a high-ranking CIA interrogations specialist whose overly-possessive love of his daughter drives him to treat Focker (yes, the name is milked for all its worth) as a potential spy, guilty until exhaustively proven innocent. Hidden spy-cameras, psychological games, and lie-

detector tests are the tip of the iceberg, masterfully applied by DeNiro.

But the film's Twilight Zone-esque, anxiety-producing flavor stems not from any of DeNiro's intrigues, but from the dystopic chemistry between Stiller and the family (whose ranks swell to include Pam's sister and her eminently successful fiancé, M.D., plus parents, her rebellious brother, DeNiro's beloved, highly-trained cat Jinxie, and Pam's sublime ex-fiancé, the favorite of the family, who took up carpentry to "follow in the footsteps of Jesus").

Just imagine the normal psychological gymnastics involved in a high-pressure first encounter: A dash of forced laughter, uneasy pauses in conversation, the protestations of likes and dislikes, tentative or brash, with fingers crossed on all sides in the hopes of a harmony of taste. Now imagine not only that one party has decided in advance that the other is unworthy and an ob-

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Meet the Parents

Starring Robert
DeNiro, Ben Stiller

A great date flick

Vacancies: Apply Within

Two important positions at Johns Hopkins are currently vacant. One is the head of the Sexual Harassment Prevention and Resolution (SHPR) Office. The other is that of the university Ombudsperson. An Ombudsperson acts as an independent, neutral third party who helps students, faculty, staff, and administrators resolve grievances and complaints through informal means, such as counseling, negotiation, and mediation. The GRO is working to ensure that these positions are filled as quickly and in as satisfactory a manner as possible. Two graduate students, Alexis Lewis and Mike Krebs, met recently with university officials to discuss these issues.

The first meeting, with Provost Steven Knapp, focused on the Ombudsperson position. Under the former organizational structure, the Ombudsperson reported to the Human Resources department. The new Ombudsperson, however, will have greater independence than the previous one because he or she will report directly to the Provost. Dr. Knapp said that the university is looking to hire a current Hopkins senior faculty member to serve as Ombudsperson. One faculty member has been asked to take on this role, but has not

yet decided whether to accept the offer; a response is expected in the next few weeks. If the faculty member declines the position, then the university must decide whether to seek out another faculty member or hire someone from outside the Hopkins community.

The second meeting, with Dean Susan Boswell, centered on the SHPR Office. Dean Boswell stated that a new Associate Provost position is being created, and that the head of the SHPR Office will serve under this Associate Provost. The sexual harassment officer will handle complaints and also provide training. She said that the hiring process for the head of the SHPR Office will not begin until the new Associate Provost is hired, so that this person can be involved in it. Dean Boswell indicated that the new Associate Provost should be in place by the end of the calendar year, and the new head of the SHPR Office should be in place by the end of the school year.

Meanwhile, current resources for students facing issues of sexual harassment include the Counseling Center, the university Chaplain, Dean Boswell, and in

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Reviews, continued

(Dinner, continued from page 2)

menu includes the owners' recommendations for the proper beer and wine complements to every dinner entrée. They also offer beer and wine tastings at the bar on Thursdays. For \$10, you can fill up on appetizers and good alcohol. Not bad!

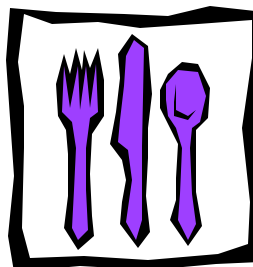
My hesitation in raving about Helen's is partially because I expected everything I ordered to be as great as what I had read. It was good, but I do wonder if the enthusiastic reviewers for the newspapers ordered something my friend and I didn't. My friend ordered one of the two standard vegetarian entrees: a veggie kabob served over pasta with feta marinara, the quality of which was uneven because some vegetables were really underdone. I had much better luck with the Greek Chicken dish, served with rice, vegetables, and tzatziki. Our meal did end very positively, though, with one of the daily dessert specials, a totally yummy Oreo Cheesecake. I left with an overall good impression of the restaurant and would be willing to return to try again, though I'd recommend others take advantage of evenings offering dinner specials and try some of the creative daily specials or higher-end entrees.

Erin Ackerman, Political Science

(Movie, continued from page 2)

ject of professionally-honed suspicion and surveillance, but also, in the manner of Greek Tragedy, the God of Body Language, First Impressions and Basic Motor Functions has been deeply offended (i.e., pissed off). Keep these words in mind as Focker gamely defends his love of dogs against deadpan DeNiro's assaults, and (if you're not covering your eyes at this point) during the numerous physical disasters triggered by Focker's several left feet and score of thumbs. I must add, in conclusion (so as not to offend the vengeful God of the Critical Critic), that Stiller can't hold a candle to the master of basic motor function chaos, Chevy Chase. But there's no need to hold this one up against the great legends of comedy. It's a decent, funny movie that shouldn't fail to satisfy a realistic appetite. Just watch the mini-doughnuts.

Dave Snyder, Political Science



Got Problems?

If you are having trouble with MEGA Life, such as problems getting reimbursed, filing claims, or anything else, contact the following people:

Dan Bain, GRO Insurance Committee, dbain@jhu.edu

Dr. Sam Parrish, Director of the SHWC, sparrish@shw.shc.jhu.edu

Mary Ellen Porter, Insurance Bid Committee, mepor@jhu.edu

Karen Sanford, JHU Representative, MEGA-Life, ksanford@student-resources.net,

We can help.

Remote Access to University Libraries (RAUL)

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Netscape, you can download it free of charge from www.netscape.com.

For more information about or to register for RAUL, see its website at <https://proxy.hcf.jhu.edu/proxyinfo/index.cfm>.

Mary Berk, Dept of Philosophy

Ombuds and SHPR Offices Vacant

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cases of physical assault, the Student Health and Wellness Center.

If you have questions, comments, or concerns about these topics, please feel free to contact Alexis Lewis at lewisac@jhu.edu or Mike Krebs at mkrebs@math.jhu.edu

Alexis Lewis and Michael Krebs

Insurance Update

(Continued from page 1)

university will not follow such a course of action is that they are doing some smart risk analysis. The nightmare would be for the IRS to rule that tuition benefits are income. The university believes that making the structural changes necessary to make insurance a pre-tax benefit will invite scrutiny and perhaps create an opportunity to redefine tuition as income. That's a significant risk of thousands of dollars in tax costs for an uncertain savings of hundreds of dollars by receiving insurance pre-tax.

Bottom line: Based on sound reasoning, the university does not want to pursue the pre-tax option. Some schools (especially public schools) do seem to avoid these pitfalls, though it seems to remain a judgment call on the university's part (you have to admit that the State of California is a much more formidable defendant than the Johns Hopkins University). Pre-tax at Hopkins, RIP. A big thank you goes out to Gary Ostrander, Associate Dean for Research, for sorting out this issue.

Payment of Student Health Insurance off of Research Grants:

You all know the old saw now, "It's hard to do this because some funding agencies, like the NIH, prohibit this type of charge." In fact, the NIH is the *only* agency (so far) that is known to prohibit charging insurance costs to research grants. Unfortunately, in this university, NIH is the

400-pound gorilla. Yet there is hope. The preliminary understanding is that this decision is not NIH's alone; rather, it is determined in a series of negotiations between NIH and its grantees. Evidently, some folks in the institutions (Hopkins and others) find this cost-saving measure less than draconian. I tend to disagree. This agreement is renegotiated every 5-10 years, though the date of the next renegotiation is not known. We will be watching and further clarification should emerge. Again Dean Ostrander deserves a big thank you for staying on this case.

In addition, Dean Busch-Vishniac (WSE) stated in a school-wide faculty meeting that she has previously charged insurance to NSF and DARPA grants in Texas and is setting her staff to work to see if this is possible here in Maryland. Dean Busch-Vishniac deserves thanks here. No one else has acknowledged this is a possibility. She is making things possible. Again, further clarification will emerge.

New Prescription (Non)Plan:

There are a number of issues involved with the new way in which we must collect our prescription benefits (see the *Grad News*, September, 2000). Susan Boswell, Interim Dean for Student Affairs, and Dr. Parrish, Director of the Student Health and Wellness Center (SHWC), have been working hard to try to accommodate students. If you have trouble paying your prescription bill and have exhausted the

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Insurance Update

(Continued from page 4)

emergency loan options offered, turn to these two administrators. They have been working out solutions throughout the last month and a half. One possible solution is to instruct students to apply for a credit card to be used solely for prescription medicines. This may not sound enticing; however, there is extra security for students, in the form of financial assistance, for those falling victim to MEGA Life's tardy reimbursements when paying off the balance. In extreme cases, Parrish and Boswell will work directly with pharmacies or cover people's bills while the reimbursement is in the mail. Dr. Parrish deserves special praise for acting to ease the burden of those taking anti-depressants. He is looking into creating the mechanism (for the first time) to be able to prescribe heavily utilized anti-depressants via the SHWC (at the \$3 co-pay.)

Dean Susan Boswell and Dr. Sam Parrish have also collaborated to ensure that graduate students with non-resident status receive access to the SHWC. If you are a non-resident grad student, you will receive a clarification by mail soon.

Of course, Mary Ellen Porter is continuing in her role as MEGA Life watch dog, fielding and fixing student complaints with style and grace. (Believe or not, MEGA Life has not been able consistently to keep their two week reimbursement promise, even in the first month of the new plan.) Thank goodness Mary Ellen is here for us.

What's next?:

Now that everyone has been thanked, we need to examine where to go next. A cursory look at nearby institutions found three significant options, which Dean Ostrander is now investigating.

1. Rearranging the payroll system so that the university can deduct a monthly insurance premium directly from student pay checks (\$75 a month isn't as distressing as a \$891 lump sum.) The med school pays a monthly premium. It seems that we should be able to adopt similar measures.
2. Rolling our insurance costs into tuition. This option was recently adopted at Georgetown University. There are significant barriers to this type of effort (i.e., we have to convince the board of trustees (hint, Peter An-

gelos is an emeritus trustee)). Yet, if Georgetown can do it, that in itself seems encouraging.

3. Subsidizing of student insurance costs by the university. Brown University pays roughly one third of its students' insurance costs. JHU is very leery of paying for all of our insurance. (That's several million dollars a year.) Yet, what if they paid a third of our insurance? (That's less than a million dollars a year.)

Look for more fun facts here!

Thanks again to all those mentioned above. If you have any questions or suggestions about any of the matters discussed here, please feel more than welcome to contact me. It is especially important to keep the GRO in the loop on MEGA Life service complaints (we plan to make this a big agenda item in contract negotiations).

Dan Bain, GRO Insurance Committee

dbain@jhu.edu

Thank You!!

Graduate students everywhere want to thank the following people for their continued efforts in making health insurance affordable for graduate students:

- **Susan Boswell**, Interim Dean for Student Affairs
- **Gary Ostrander**, Associate Dean for Research
- **Sam Parrish**, Director of the SHWC
- **Mary Ellen Porter**, Special Asst to the Dean of Homewood Student Affairs
- **Ilene Busch-Vishniac**, Dean for School of Engineering
- **Dan Bain**, GRO Insurance Committee
- **Tony Stapon**, GRO Chair

Credits

The Graduate Representative Organization

Levering Hall (inside the Student Activities Office)
Phone: 410-516-7682
Email: gro@jhu.edu
www.jhu.edu/gro

Grad News Editor

Mary Berk, Department of Philosophy
mberk@jhu.edu

Contributors

Erin Ackerman
Dan Bain
Mary Berk
Mike Krebs
Alexis Lewis
David Snyder

The BGSA is Back!

The **Black Graduate Student Association** (BGSA) provides a support network aimed at promoting the academic success of African, African-American and Afro-Caribbean graduate students at Johns Hopkins University. The BGSA invites all interested graduate students to join our email listserv by contacting Jami Valentine (jami@pha.jhu.edu) or Ade Lukan (ALukan@jhu.edu). For more information, please see our web page at www.pha.jhu.edu/~jami/BGSA.html

Just Because You're a Graduate Student

Coffee Hour:

Every Monday from 3 to 4 p.m. in the Gilman Hall Coffee Bar. Free coffee and snacks; ends promptly at 4.

Happy Hour

Every Tuesday night from 6 to 10 p.m. at PJ's Pub. Bass and Guinness pints for \$2, as well as food specials.

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

The Graduate Happy Hour, Graduate Coffee Hour, and Graduate Forum are all **sponsored by the GRO**. Contact Tony Stapon for more information:

Drugs cost too much?

Are you currently taking prescription anti-depressants? Is MEGA Life charging you 50% **and** a co-pay? This is a **mistake**. Contact Dan Bain (dbain@jhu.edu) and Mary Ellen Porter (meporter@jhu.edu) to claim your rightful reimbursement.

Let Us Know!

If your organization is hosting an event, seeking sponsors, or wants to make an announcement, let us know! If you have news about campus happenings, let us know! If you just want to spread some good gossip, let us know!

Contact Mary Berk (mberk@jhu.edu) with information.

