

TO: Provost Persis Drell  
Members of the University Budget Group

FROM: ASSU Executive President Shanta Katipamula  
ASSU Executive Vice President Rosie Nelson

DATE: February 25, 2018

Re: **ASSU Priorities for 2019-2020 University Budget**

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## **BACKGROUND**

We believe addressing student belonging on our campus continues to be the university's most pressing need in both the undergraduate and graduate populations. Students enter Stanford battling impostor syndrome while also coping with stress, mental health challenges, and a new environment. The vast majority of us arrive on-campus without being prepared for the reality of life at Stanford. As a result, we continue to struggle during our time here as a result of insufficient resources, including from inadequate graduate student stipends, limited mental health resource access, and too few advisors to help students feel supported.

Last year, the Budget Group heard this concern through ASSU Executive President Justice Tention's Fall Retreat presentation and in turn provided much-needed increased funding for our student community centers. We greatly appreciate this funding increase, as does the rest of the student body. The additional resources for community centers have helped ensure that many of our most marginalized students have access to critical support systems. We hope that community centers continue to be generously funded well into the future. We request the Budget Group to continue supporting student well-being and belonging through the initiatives outlined below.

## **CURRENT STUDENT PRIORITIES**

### Increase Support & Services for Students with Disabilities

Too many of our students with disabilities experience discrimination from faculty, staff and administrators despite having multiple university offices tasked with supporting members of the disability community. The Office of Accessible Education (OAE) is portrayed to students as a central resource and support structure, yet OAE frequently burdens students with arranging their own accommodations and is ill-informed about resources available for students across different schools, departments, and administrative units. Our student to OAE staff ratio is below the national standard, therefore resulting in a substandard level of support for our students with disabilities. Funding for additional OAE staff, accompanied with more rigorous training, collaboration, and programming would be valuable to our campus community. Additionally,

faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows, teaching assistants, and student staff would benefit from additional training on how to support students with disabilities.

### Address Concerns around Mental Health & Wellness

Stanford has a mental health crisis, and it's not new. We need to increase the capacity of Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) to be able to meet increased student demand and decrease wait times. However, we need to ensure that we are hiring more diverse clinicians who can assist our diverse student body. As we successfully expand care models within our community centers, we must also serve populations who do not have community centers including students with disabilities, veterans, first generation and low income (FLI) students, and student parents. CAPS has continued to struggle with staff retention, particularly for clinicians of color who are in high demand. Being situated in the Bay Area means that we are continuously competing with tech companies as well as the high cost of living. We must provide competitive pay for our clinical staff to attract top and diverse talent.

Beyond the need for additional staffing resources, CAPS would benefit from additional funding to develop and pilot innovative programming and therapy models. Programs such as CAPS Connects have brought counselors into new student spaces and communities and have started bridging the lack of resources and should be grown.

While we must increase access to mental health resources, we also must work toward supporting student wellness. Given Stanford's isolation from accessible off-campus social activities and the diminishing on-campus social scene, students do not have enough opportunities to have a healthy social life and take a break from the stress of college. While we hope this is something that will be definitively addressed through VPSA's ongoing efforts, we think that in the short term Residential Programs (ResPro) should receive additional funds to disburse to dorms. Expanding the pool of Experiential Learning Funds (ELF) would be useful, but the current system is bureaucratic to navigate, and we believe having a more flexible pool of funds with less strings attached would be beneficial to student wellbeing. This way, dorms can host more off-campus excursions and allow students to have equitable access to off-campus social activities in the Bay Area.

### Improve Student Advising Experiences

Students enter Stanford with a variety of backgrounds that impact college readiness, ability to succeed in demanding introductory classes that assume a strong high school background in the subject, and ultimately the field that a student may choose to enter. As they navigate the myriad of courses, majors and experiences that Stanford has, students often feel overwhelmed by the choices at their fingertips. Advisors are crucial to helping students determine which courses might be most accessible to them, which majors are best suited to their interests and potential career paths, and how they can get funding for summer projects. However, we have an

insufficient number of academic advising directors (AADs) to adequately support students. Additionally, many students are unsure of the relationship between the variety of different advisors assigned to them and which advisor they should meet with and when. Greater integration and collaboration between departments and advising units such as UAR would greatly help demystify the advising process for students. Stanford's decentralization often causes students to be shuffled from one administrative office to another. Increasing the number of AADs would increase the possibilities for collaboration and help AADs serve as more of a central resource for students. This restructuring of the AAD role while simultaneously increasing the AAD to student ratio would help students feel more at ease and a greater sense of belonging.

Faculty are a critical component of shaping a student's experience and determining whether a student truly feels like they belong. Faculty-student interactions, whether in a formal classroom setting or an advising setting, determine whether a student will continue in a particular major or course of research. A positive interaction may be the encouragement a student needs to take the leap into declaring a particular course of study, while a negative interaction, such as in the form of discrimination, can have tremendous harm on a student's mental well-being. Students are clamoring for increased faculty training to address these shortfalls in the faculty-advisee relationship. We recommend strengthened training for faculty and other student advisors to ensure that all of our students, regardless of discipline or department, have a positive Stanford experience.

## **EMERGING STUDENT PRIORITIES**

Recognizing the tight budget this year, there are a number of student priorities that we encourage the Budget Group to keep in mind through the next few budget cycles that will help foster student belonging.

### Increase Affordability of Stanford for FLI Students

While Stanford has generous financial aid policies which it continues to expand, there are many ways in which Stanford is still financially inaccessible to FLI students, such as through course fees, and food insecurity over spring break. Advertised course fees may prevent a student from enrolling in a class, such as physical education and arts classes ranging from \$25 to \$500. Also important, however, are the costs of project materials that are not disclosed to students when they enroll in the class. Too many classes in programs such as Mechanical Engineering or Product Design require students to purchase additional materials, tools, and supplies that directly correlate to class grades. Further, many of these project-based classes do not place upper limits on spending, frequently allowing a student who has the financial ability to spend \$1,000 on project materials to deliver a more impressive final product than a student who may only be able to spend \$50 or less. This inequity is unacceptable.

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If we as a university are committed to making Stanford an equitable, inclusive community where all students feel a sense of belonging, we must eliminate barriers such as course fees, eliminate food insecurity over spring break, and ensure continued support for the FLI Office and Leland Scholars Program (LSP) which provide valuable resources and guidance to our FLI students.

### Support Sexual Violence Prevention Programming & Resources

We are grateful for the additional resources allocated a few years ago to develop more prevention programming, such as Beyond Sex Ed. We remain committed to ensuring that all our students get annual prevention training, in accordance with research-based best practices. To expand Beyond Sex Ed, develop live graduate student training, and better support queer and trans students, we anticipate a need for increased financial support for the SARA Office.

### Student Families

We thank the Provost for establishing the need-based childcare grant last year. We hope that in the coming years, this fund will be expanded beyond \$10,000 to offer more robust childcare support given the high cost of childcare in the Bay Area.

### Pipeline Development for Future Faculty

Stanford is a leader in higher education and must take the initiative to develop outstanding and diverse faculty to maintain this status. To that end, it is paramount that there is a continued commitment to increasing support for students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. As cuts are considered due to economic conditions this year and in the future, our commitment to equity should not falter. Funding that helps support our diverse communities, via community centers, and programming and mentorship such as EDGE and DARE Fellowships, should be sustained. Additionally, we urge the university to increase funding for creating partnerships with minority serving institutions and campuses with a high percentage of Pell Grant recipients. To increase the diversity of future faculty, we must increase the diversity of our graduate population and we recommend looking at the partnership model that universities such as Vanderbilt have established with HBCUs.

### Other Student Concerns

We sent a survey to all students to inform our budget presentation, which informed the bulk of the asks detailed above - the support for FLI students was the most common response on our survey. However, we wanted to list other common student funding priorities for the awareness of the Budget Group. Student priorities include funding student stipends, housing for graduate students and postdocs, student theater, Cardinal Care, Cardinal Service, community centers, on-campus groceries, OCS community outreach funding, CAPS, services for sexual assault and intimate partner violence survivors, general research funding for Masters students, housing for

Masters in Science Physician Assistant (MSPA) studies students, student staff pay equity, conference funding for students, and sustainably dealing with waste.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our students need additional support to thrive at Stanford. We recognize that the current economic realities mean that this will be a tight budget year. We ask you to prioritize budgetary requests that will serve to support student belonging, including but not limited to the requests that we have mentioned in this memo. As a university, we are focused on our academic mission by providing students with the tools to create the next big startup, conduct award winning research, and craft effective legislation once students graduate. However, to truly prepare students for the real world we must also support their mental health and wellness, which is rooted in creating a sense of belonging for students.