Graduate Fellowships
at Stanford University
Investing in Our Future
“The need for properly trained students in our global community is huge. All the things that will drive the economies of the future are now being born in institutions like this.”

Paul Wender
FRANCIS W. BERGSTROM PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY

Fellowships to Support Graduate Students

Education is not a solitary affair. The best kind of learning takes place in environments where collaboration happens easily: in labs, in seminars, in casual conversations around the watercooler or at the lunch table.

Professors share their ideas with students, but that is only one part of the equation. What makes a university a stimulating and productive environment is the role that students play in contributing to new knowledge and discoveries.

Graduate students—doctoral students in particular—not only receive knowledge but also create it, and that doesn't take place in a vacuum. Rather, they discuss, teach, and share information with everyone around them. This includes their peers, with whom they collaborate in all kinds of intellectually rewarding ways; undergraduates, who rely on graduate students as teaching assistants; and professors, who depend on their doctoral students to raise the intellectual bar, both in and outside the classroom.

“Graduate students are a critical component of the educational ecosystem at a research university,” says Sakurako Daniel Fisher, ’82, a member of the Humanities and Sciences Council and one of Stanford’s most dedicated friends. A significant amount of the high-level research that makes Stanford a world-class university is done by graduate students. They play a major role in the pioneering, can-do ethos that Stanford is known for.

How Graduate Students Make a Difference

Most graduate students spend two years taking classes, serving as teaching assistants, and working in labs. By the time they reach their third and fourth years they have begun to develop their own research questions in the course of writing their dissertations, which effectively launch their careers. By this point, graduate students’ contributions have attained a high level of excellence, and professors rely on their work.

Faculty depend on graduate students not only to carry out research projects and test new hypotheses, but also to challenge existing beliefs, facilitate the flow of ideas, and ultimately to reshape their chosen disciplines. According to Richard Saller, the Vernon R. and Lysbeth Anderson Dean of the School of Humanities and Sciences and the Kleinheinz Family Professor of European Studies, Stanford needs a critical mass of graduate students for faculty members to operate most productively.

Professors across campus regularly affirm this observation. Robert Simoni, the Donald Kennedy Chair of the Department of Biology, refuses to accept new faculty appointments unless a corresponding number of graduate students are enrolled. He says that without enough high-quality graduate students, professors will simply leave.

In fact, graduate students play a key role in retaining top faculty at Stanford. “I’ve had tempting offers to go elsewhere, and it’s always been the graduate students who have kept me here, not the great facilities or the weather or the wonderful lifestyle,” says Ron Kopito, professor of biology. “The bottom line is, where’s my source of really creative energy really going to come from if I go someplace else?”

Diversity in the Graduate Student Populations

The School of Humanities and Sciences is proud of the diversity of its undergraduate students, and Dean Saller is focused on bringing the same level of diversity to our doctoral student population. Diversity is critical on many levels. First, it ensures a healthy variety of perspectives, within the classroom and beyond, in research that is ultimately published and disseminated to the world at large. And because doctoral students are in the pipeline to become future faculty, a diverse graduate student body leads to diverse faculty—not just at Stanford but at all universities. Fellowships to support a diverse population of doctoral students are a key priority.
Graduate students, however, are often in short supply. When the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, an essential component of Stanford’s China Studies program, received 50 applications, only three doctoral students were admitted. Chao Fen Sun, a professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, laments this state of affairs. “It’s really difficult for professors to create an intellectually exciting environment with just one or two graduate students,” he says. “When I have five or six graduate students, the dynamic is totally different.”

In 2011, there were 2,159 doctoral students in the School of Humanities and Sciences. Considering that the school is Stanford’s largest, with more than 500 faculty members, that number hardly constitutes a critical mass.

Meet the Students
Stanford’s doctoral students are exceptional. They are passionate, driven, and tireless in their quest to uncover new knowledge. They are entrepreneurs, boundary pushers, and risk takers. And they want to change the world. They work to do this in many ways, not the least of which is by continuing to contribute to the world of higher education.

Annelise K. Madsen, art history PhD ’10, completed a dissertation charting the influence of civic art on immigration, suffrage, and educational reform during the Progressive era. Her analysis of the mural painting and pageantry of the time invites scholars to look anew at the public art of the period, which art historians have often dismissed as outmoded and out of touch with a modernizing America. “I am demonstrating how civic art participated in contemporary political and cultural struggles to define American citizenship,” she says. Annelise received a Centennial Teaching Assistant Award from the Center for Teaching and Learning for her mentoring of fellow graduate students in the Department of Art and Art History. In addition to research and teaching, she gave gallery talks at the Cantor Arts Center. She has her long-term sights set on academia.

Camila Donatti, biology PhD ’12, examines the effects of animal extinctions on seed dispersal in the Brazilian wetlands—an important topic given the high rate at which large vertebrates around the world are dying out. “Since I work in a very pristine study site, I use computer simulations of animal extinctions to predict what will happen to the process of seed dispersal once the animals are gone,” she says. A native of Brazil and a graduate of São Paulo State University, Camila is also an active member of the Brazilian Students Association. She plans to pursue a postdoctoral fellowship.

Funding for Scientists
Graduate fellowships are imperative for students across the school, and nowhere is the need more urgent than in the natural sciences. Scientific research is, by nature, time-consuming and expensive. Data gathering and experimentation can take years, and many scientists require highly technical equipment, materials, and labs, as well as travel expenses and field staff. Yet, due to the unstable and unpredictable nature of government funding for the sciences, graduate students in those fields have the hardest time obtaining support—especially those who pursue interdisciplinary research addressing the most complex scientific issues.

This ultimately restricts the advancement of science. “If you see an exciting opportunity that is not related to existing programs, how do you generate new ideas?” asks Robert Waymouth, the Robert Eckles Swain Professor of Chemistry. “Until we can get somebody to try out the idea, we don’t even have a basis for writing a proposal. It’s critical that we support our graduate students so they can make the initial connections and develop those exciting ideas.”
Jesse Cunha, economics PhD ’10, uses economic theory to address public policy in developing countries. His comparative analysis of two methods of improving nutrition and health in poor rural communities in Mexico may refute the long-held belief that goods transferred to the poor are more effective than the equivalent value in cash. “The merits of giving in kind versus giving in cash have been debated for ages,” he says. The benefit of a study like this is that if you answer the question using experimental data, it’s hard to refute the evidence.” Since graduating, Jesse has become an assistant professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

Graduate Fellowships: A Strategic Investment

The availability of adequate funding is among the reasons that students come to Stanford. In fact, the ability of a doctoral program to support its students is one measure of its success. Support is given in the form of fellowships or grants to allow a student to pursue his or her academic pursuits. Of the more than 700 outstanding doctoral students who are accepted by the School of Humanities and Sciences, fewer than half enroll. These are some of the very best students in the world. Unless we have the resources necessary to offer financial support to the most promising students, we are at risk of losing many of them to peer institutions.

If we believe that knowledge is transformative, the best investment we can make is in our graduate students. Bringing these young scholars to Stanford is such a high priority that Dean Saller has allocated generous matching funds from a gift from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to support new graduate fellowships. We hope that alumni and friends will partner with the university to support more graduate students and, ultimately, enable Stanford’s rising stars to continue to make a difference, now and in the future.

GIVING OPPORTUNITY

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<td>Gift earns $400,000 in matching funds, creating a $1.2 million endowment.</td>
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