

**Notes from meeting held on January 31<sup>st</sup>  
in the Lory Student Center's Grey Rock room  
concerning CSU Graduate Student Health Insurance Bill (HB 07-1026)**

**Background**

The meeting was sponsored by the CSU Center for Public Deliberation and the Graduate Student Council. The main speaker was Vice Provost for Graduate Affairs Peter Dorhout. Dr. Dorhout testified on behalf of a bill sponsored by Representative John Kefalas (D) that would change the wording in the statute governing whether or not universities can require students to purchase health care insurance. The bill would change the sentence that now reads, "The governing board of any institution of higher education shall not require any student to purchase health care insurance or health care services" to "The governing board of any institution of higher education shall not require ~~any~~ an undergraduate student to purchase health care insurance or health care services." Dorhout testified to the Colorado House of Representatives' Education Committee on Monday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, in support of the bill. The handout from his testimony, which was also provided at the meeting in Lory, is attached to the end of these notes.

**Dorhout's introductory comments**

CSU health insurance has increased by 50% in last 3 years, leading to less students being covered. Bill will remove roadblocks to the university obtaining better health insurance for graduate students.

CSU is a flagship university and highly regarded nationally and internationally, and does attract high quality graduate students. CSU competes with other universities such as Iowa, Illinois, Ohio State, and Texas A&M for graduate students.

When finished, CSU graduate students often stay in state and benefit economy. Last May, 48% stayed in Colorado, 13% were involved or interested in starting their own companies. Thus, the quality of graduate students impacts the state as a whole.

CSU is the only research extensive university in CO that is restricted from requiring students to purchase health insurance. CU, UNC, Adams, and Metro are all exempt.

Explained current statute, and how other universities were exempt because they were already requiring health insurance when the statute was established in 1994.

11 of 12 "peer institutions" require health insurance or a hard waiver. CSU current policy costs \$1799/year, which is 23% higher than average of peer institutions.

CSU needs to be pro-active with negotiating with health-care providers.

University's strategic plan and "stretch goals" call for significant growth in graduate programs. To be competitive, CSU needs to be able to attract the best and provide adequate health care.

Current voluntary nature has caused a decrease in the number of students signing up.

Graduate student council had significant concerns with increasing costs, especially compared to competitors. Though the decision should not come down to health insurance, if two schools are otherwise similar, stipends and health insurance can be the difference.

Other universities can offer competitive care at lower prices than CSU

Bill doesn't require all grad students to purchase health plan.

Bill removes roadblocks to negotiate for better health premiums for grad students.

The bill does not require any change in policy. Only the governing board can make the decision to require grad students to purchase health care from the university. Bill allows university to negotiate better with insurance companies. Insurance companies, especially as they consolidate, are reluctant to negotiate because there is no hard waiver. Hard waivers require you to either purchase university plan or provide proof that you have adequate health care from spouse, parent, or independent provider.

Grad students are part of a different demographic than undergrads. Average 33 years of age, thus often no parents to provide health care ("emancipated adult").

National survey also showed that the single most important factor in losing graduate students was insufficient health insurance.

**Comments from Graduate Student Council (GSC) representatives:**

Current university plan is expensive and intended for undergrads, but grads are different, have diverse needs.

University asked Kefalas to sponsor the bill, and GSC leadership has been involved and supports the bill.

The bill would free up the university to do more.

Not all student will have to purchase the plan from CSU, and would use a phased-in program that applies to new graduate students only

New students will be able to consider the program as they consider the overall CSU package. Current students would be able to take advantage of new plans if they choose.

Will lower costs, with variety of plans and benefits

Concerns raised by the GSC have been addressed well by Provost Dorhout.

Asked for graduate students in audience to get involved with GSC, which will continue being involved in the issue.

**Representative Kevin Lundberg (R)**

Was originator of this meeting, wanted to know what students felt about the bill since he will be asked to vote on the bill.

While it doesn't mandate health coverage, argued that would be the effect of the bill.

### **Representative from GSC**

Additional benefit of the bill is that if health coverage is mandatory, that cost can be included in how financial aid is calculated

### **Audience comments and questions**

Disabled graduate student urged against support for the bill. Explained the difficult process she has gone through to get help through CSU plan. Argued that university will become advocate for insurance companies, and seek lowest price plan and it will become mandated. Decision-making will be transferred to the university. Pleaded to students to not allow the university to become their insurance broker.

Question was asked to Dr. Dorhout concerning what the cost would be of the CSU plan if bill is passed. Dorhout responded that it was unclear, since they are unable to negotiate right now, and that is why they are not asking for a mandate, but rather the flexibility. Audience member explained that even if new program saved 25%, that would only be \$35 a month, which doesn't seem to be enough of a difference for students to pick one school over another. Argued that cart was being put before the horse if costs are not known. Also expressed concern that students are wanting someone else to pay for their insurance.

Student from Turkish Student Association presented statistics that showed the CSU's insurance was much higher than other universities, and has increased significantly in recent years.

Student mentioned that comparing premiums is not enough, must consider co-pays, maximums, and deductibles as well.

Representative from Hartshorn Health Center (Raydean Canfield) provided information concerning current plans. Explained that currently no plans that used deductibles were available. The CSU plan is a comprehensive plan, however. She also explained that

Student expressed concern over who determines what is "adequate health care" if health care is mandated, and believed the university should not be the entity that determines that.

Student explained that some universities, such as Wisconsin, allow individual departments to supplement insurance or pay student's fees.

Dr. Dorhout explained that there are not rules in place to prevent that at CSU, and also explained that Wisconsin is a different case because the graduate students are unionized.

Students expressed concern about the rule that requires students under CSU plan to go to Hartshorn first and then be referred to other institutions or specialists. Student would prefer a plan that allows students to go directly to outside sources. Dr. Dorhout replied that that was a reasonable request.

Student from the Chinese Student Association explained that international students are required to have health insurance, and would like to see different programs and a variety of options. Graduate students have different health needs. He also asked if it was possible for international students to get waivers, as he has tried three times and been denied for three different reasons. It is also illegal for international students to work off campus. The cost is now \$1,200 a year, which is ludicrous for insurance he did not feel he needed.

Student explained that current plan is not comprehensive, and that her allergy problem was not covered, nor were women's annual exams. She found an independent insurer to provide better insurance at lower cost.

Question was asked concerning the % of students serving as TAs or RAs, and thus employed by the university. Dr. Dorhout estimated 600 TAs and 1,200 – 1,400 RAs out of 3,600 total graduate students, so roughly 50%.

### **Close of meeting**

Martín Carcasson from the Center from Public Deliberation explained that he would provide notes to the meeting online. Representative Lundberg asked for a vote of those in room concerning the bill. Dr. Carcasson explained that the vote would only represent the room, not graduate students in general, but did ask the audience to show either their support, opposition, or undecided status on the bill. Six students voted for the bill, twelve against, and one undecided. The meeting then adjourned.



*The following information was provided by Provost Dorhout to the House Education Committee, and was also provided as a handout at the 1/31 meeting.*

**Please Support HB 07-1026 (Kefalas)  
Student Health Insurance**

The Graduate School  
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1005  
Telephone: (970) 491-6817  
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**The proposed bill amends language to state statute that prohibits public universities from requiring health care coverage for graduate and professional students.**

Colorado State University is one of the nation's premier Land Grant universities with signature graduate and professional programs that lead in research and training in disciplines such as veterinary and biomedical sciences, water and environmental resource management, agriculture, and technology, and provide critical workforce development for the citizens of Colorado. This bill will enable CSU to remain competitive for the best graduate and professional students by providing flexibility in negotiating health insurance plans.

In 1994, Senate Bill 94-218 amended Section 2. 23-5-106 of the Colorado Revised Statutes addressing the authority of governing boards of state institutions to require any student to purchase health care insurance or health care services. At that time, CRS 23-5-106 (3) (a) was created and currently reads: "The governing board of any institution of higher education shall not require any student to purchase health care insurance or health care services." These provisions do not apply to any program that was in existence at an institution of higher education on January 1, 1994. The exempt institutions include the University of Colorado, Colorado School of Mines, the University of Northern Colorado, Metro State College, and Adams State College, who continue to require their full-time students to purchase or show proof of health insurance at the time of registration.

Currently, CSU is the only public Research Extensive University in Colorado with a voluntary student health insurance program for its students as mandated by the above state statute. In the past few years, health insurance premiums at CSU have risen by 50% to levels that are 23% higher than those at peer institutions that require health insurance. The impact on graduate and professional students is significant. This year, only about 11% of graduate students voluntarily purchased the CSU student health insurance plan.

By the nature of graduate and professional training, graduate student demographics are significantly different from undergraduate students. For example, 58% of all doctoral students are married (or have a dependent in a relationship) and have a median age of 33 at the time of graduation. Graduate students are more likely to be emancipated or not eligible for coverage under parents' insurance programs than undergraduate students.

To fulfill its Strategic Mission, CSU needs to attract and retain outstanding graduate and professional students. Currently, 34% of graduate students at CSU are completing advanced training tied to federal or state funded projects with limited stipend support. These limited stipends should be balanced by affordable, appropriate health insurance. However, the broad language in the current statute restricts the university's options to react to the changing demographics and needs of graduate and professional students. The requested change in statute will provide the university with the necessary flexibility to design health insurance programs that will better serve the students as they progress along their professional career path.