

GSA Health Insurance Task Force Report Executive Summary

In the summer of 2004, the GSA formed a task force to examine the issue of health insurance for graduate students. The task force compared health insurance options for Rice graduate students to those available at other institutions, as well as to Rice employees.

The Rice Plan Today – For graduate students who do not obtain health insurance through their parents or spouse, Rice offers the “Rice Plan”--a third party-managed student health insurance plan paid for through the Rice Cashier’s office but provided by a commercial insurance provider. The Student Health Insurance committee, which consists of Rice administrators, faculty, and students, selects the plan and provider each year.

In the fall of 2002, the Rice Office of Graduate Studies began offering a subsidy to supported graduate students, to defray the cost of the Rice Plan premium. The subsidy for the 2004-2005 school year was \$1000, about 56% of the \$1769 premium. There is no additional financial assistance for covering a spouse or dependents. (In 2004-2005, the cost for a student who added a spouse and one dependent to the Rice Plan was \$6,360).

Other Graduate Institutions – The task force collected data on 23 graduate institutions using a list based on a similar study of health insurance for Rice employees. In our survey, 12 of the 23 schools subsidize 100% of the health insurance premium for graduate students and two additional schools subsidize over 75%. Additionally, two of the private schools that offer full subsidization also have higher premiums than Rice and three offer some form of additional assistance for insuring dependents.

Rice Employees – Rice offers four options for health insurance coverage to its employees. The costs and benefits vary, however the university consistently pays about 80% of the premium for individual employees, regardless of the plan chosen. For employees insuring a spouse or partner, Rice covers about 70% of the entire premium, well over the 56% subsidy available to graduate students.

Recommendations – The Task Force proposed the following recommendations regarding graduate health insurance at Rice:

- A full or fixed percentage level of subsidy (at least 70%)
- A payroll deduction of the student share of the premium over 12 months
- The Student Health Insurance Committee should meet earlier in the year to aid in finding a more competitive plan
- The consideration of more radical alternatives, such as of putting Rice students and employees into a single plan, enrolling students in the current employee plan, combining our risk pool with students from other Houston area universities, or other creative solutions
- The creation of an implementation committee or task force consisting of students and administrators that will follow up on the report and the recommendations made therein

Please direct comments or inquiries to the co-chairs:
Marcos Huerta (marcosh@rice.edu) or Angela Hvitved (hvitved@rice.edu)