Housing Affordability
Is the deck stacked against us?

Housing and commuting. We know they’re on your mind. Postdocs face enormous competition to get affordable housing, often at the expense of a lengthy commute. The house of cards represents both the impossible climb towards cheap rents and fast commutes, and the fragility of the system which could collapse at any moment. In this month's mailer, we share the results of an internal survey on postdoc housing and transportation, and some real-life stories from your fellow postdocs.
What's up, postdoc?

June 12th: oSTEM meeting, 5pm, fountain near Hewlett and Gates in Engineering Quad
June 12th: SBPA meeting and co-presidents election, 1pm, MSOB x140
June 13th: Successful Strategies for Future Professors, 12pm, MSOB 140 Register
June 13th: Summer Film Festival, Geology Corner, Building 320, Room 105, Info
June 14th: Mentoring in Research, 9:00am-12:30pm, MSOB 140, Info
June 14th: Improving access to care in LGBT Mental Health, 1-2pm, 401 Quarry Rd #2209
June 15th: Eid ul-Fitr Celebration, 12pm, White Plaza, Info
June 17th: Stanford Commencement, 4pm, Stanford Stadium, Info
June 28th: Council Meeting, 11:30am-1:00pm, El Centro Chicano y Latino, 1st floor, RSVP
June 28th: Art and Yoga at Anderson Collection, 6pm, Anderson Collection lawn, Info

Be sure to check out our Calendar for info on all SURPAS events!

Living on the dock of the Bay
The SURPAS housing & transportation survey

Are you a single postdoc? Are you a married postdoc? Do you have kids? Cats? Dogs? Do you have a family member to take care of? Are you dating? Do you love to cook or fancy Uber Eats? Do you own a car or are you a bike addict? Guess what… it doesn’t really matter what your status is, the only question that counts here is Are you a Stanford postdoc? If the answer is “yes” then we probably have a common problem: HOUSING, and now is the time to say it out loud!

Last year, we wanted to get a more defined picture of the postdoc housing situation, so the Housing and Transportation Committee, launched a detailed survey on the matter. Over 300 responders shared information on their housing and commute experiences. Now, in light of the University-wide Long Range Planning, we have a unique opportunity to work towards lasting solutions for postdoc affordability. So maybe you’ve been struggling to find housing or maybe you’re one of the luckier ones. Either way, it is helpful to appreciate the breadth of experiences postdocs face, and know that you are not alone. While responses to our survey were completely voluntary and thus may not be a fully representative sample, we hope this article gives you a better idea of what your fellow postdocs are working with, so you too can be a more effective advocate for postdoc housing!

The Bay Area: “it’s like Hollywood but for smart people”

We all know what is going on in the Bay Area: the region has been experiencing an enormous economic boom, owed largely to a growing tech sector which draws excellence from all over the world with high salaries. In this climate, housing has become a hot commodity, granting landlords the opportunity to increase rent prices. While tech salaries can compete in this market, with $53,406 minimum per year, Stanford postdocs simply cannot. While the imminent raise to a $60,000 minimum will provide some much needed relief, it will only make us marginally more competitive. In fact, Stanford postdocs can still hardly afford any type of housing in the area unless we are willing to give up or put a hold on personal freedoms (eg. cooking whenever/whatever we wish, owning a car, pets, privacy) and major life plans (eg. family, savings, retirement). With most of us being in our late 20s/ early 30s, and a ‘er 20+ years of education, this is becoming increasingly difficult to justify.

Finding housing as a new postdoc is challenging

Cost, high turnover, and availability make finding affordable housing a stressful and seemingly impossible process. Our data revealed that 64% of postdocs will not have secured housing before moving to the area. This is not surprising considering that new postdocs move from across the country and the world (many without a credit history!). Most will need at least two weeks to find housing, with 20% of new postdocs needing more than 4 weeks. This means that, before earning a dollar at Stanford, most postdocs will have laid out thousands for an expensive hotel or AirBnB during their search, a deposit, and first month’s rent.

Costs, commutes, and big compromises
Responsible financial planning advises that no more than 30% of the gross income should be spent towards housing. For postdocs paid the minimum salary (aka most of us), that would mean a max of $1,335 for monthly rent ($1500 after the raise) - a laughable amount even for many shared apartments (Fig. 1). Therefore, it is unsurprising that only 30% of postdocs in a single living situation can afford to live in a single apartment, paying on average $1820/month. Postdocs supporting a dependent (parents comprise 15% of the surveyed population; 20% of whom are single parents) face greater financial and housing challenges. Postdocs living with a partner or child pay $2290 per month, individually, which amounts to 50% of the current postdoc salary and 46% after the increase. The solution to the cost x availability equation drives postdocs to live increasingly farther, with 40% of us having commute times longer than 30 minutes (not accounting for traffic). Given that the average postdoc is on campus 5.5 days of the week, with 25% of us commuting 7 days a week, this becomes a stressful burden on top of the many responsibilities a typical postdoc has.

Figure 1. Distribution of apartments available to a single postdoc in the South Bay area.

Figure 2. Visual summary of SURPAS Housing + Transportation survey results
Is there any hope in sight?

Stanford postdocs are not new to this conundrum: in 2002 the cost of living in the Bay Area generated the same frustrating situation we are experiencing today. Though the minimum salary has been raised a number of times since then, it remains equally uncompetitive with the housing prices. Stanford West, the one complex where postdocs qualify for priority housing has one bedroom apartments starting at $2,412 and a BMR (below market rate) waiting list closed indefinitely.

Between the 2017 Long Range Planning (LRP) initiative and a historic presentation to the Faculty Senate, postdocs and our advocates across the university finally see some hope in sight. Recommendations to address the postdoc affordability crisis have been coming from multiple directions, with support from faculty, admins and even undergraduates!

Last month, Provost Drell’s announcement of raising the minimum salary to $60,000 starting this September came as a pleasant surprise and acknowledgement of the urgency that affordability for postdocs presents. While we understand that this will place a higher burden on PI budgets, we also continue to affirm that, for most of us, this increase is a much needed respite, but not a solution to our troubles. We do maintain hope that, as the Provost stated, this is just the first step towards making a postdoc at Stanford affordable. We look forward to continuing working with the administration on finding sustainable solutions to this problem, as outlined in the recently-unveiled LRP plan.

Thoughts on these results or ideas for ways forward? Get in touch!

How to be an effective housing advocate

- **Talk to people!** PIs, grad students, administrators etc. - these are people that often have more leverage than us, since they directly pay or are hired by Stanford.
- **Back up your claims with facts.** Use statistics to support your arguments. Do good research - and let SURPAS know how we can help!
- **Tell your personal story.** Don’t be another nameless, faceless victim of the ‘postdoc crisis’. Make sure the people who care about you hear your story.
- **Serve with us.** Postdoc turnover is high, so we are always on the lookout for more hands and brains. Come to a council meeting or check out the SURPAS Housing and Transportation committee page, and get in touch to find out how you can become a member!

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**Postdoc Spotlight**

**Dr. Natalie Nevarez**

*Postdoc, Stanford School of Medicine*

Each month we introduce you to one of your fellow postdocs. This month we had a chat with Dr. Natalie Nevarez. She joined Stanford last year via OPA’s PRISM program, and now she’s gearing up to start a LatinX postdoc group at Stanford (keep an eye out for that).

**Where do you hail from?**
My parents are migrant farm workers. I was born close to here, in Gilroy - the Garlic Capitol of America. If you have experienced the thick smell of garlic, when you drove south from Stanford, well, that’s where I lived. We used to migrate between San Luis, Arizona/Mexico and here. So it’s hard to call one place home. For the longest time it has been San Luis.

**Was it hard for you to uproot every few months and move somewhere new?**

Not really. Our whole community used to migrate together. So I retained my friends and family. It was nice actually.

**Tell us about your experience moving to the Bay Area.**

The biggest issue was house-hunting. After a while I figured that you just have to bite the bullet, and so I quickly accepted that just about everything is expensive. You can’t follow the ‘rent should be under 30% of your salary’ rule here. I moved into a house that I found on craigslist. The landlord lived on the property. He was really inappropriate and the situation wasn’t suitable for a single female. I could not afford to live and feel safe knowing that he had a key to my apartment. I had to move out. Although I had people warn me against living in East Palo Alto, I found a nice affordable apartment there. Affordable - but still expensive! Overall, I am happy there. Compared to other places I’ve lived, East Palo Alto seems like a perfectly nice neighborhood. In fact I almost feel at home here. Another perk - I am closer to better and cheaper food! I would recommend that new postdocs move here first, get a temporary accommodation and get a sense of the city, before they decide to sign a lease. From the outside, you have no idea of how neighborhoods or sections differ and what their reputations are. For example, in East Palo Alto you can move two blocks east, and and the rent is $1000 cheaper. You would not have that context from the outside. A lot of times many of these factors - safety, reputation of a neighborhood, commute time, are very subjective and depend on people’s baseline.

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**Perspective: Pride and Postdocs**

Dear Postdocs,

Summer is near, which means it’s **Pride Month**! Pride began as a day to remember the **Stonewall Riots** in New York City, and has grown into a month-long celebration of LGBTQ+ history and progress toward equal rights worldwide (with different celebrations throughout the year depending on the country). This year’s Pride also marks the 3 year anniversary of **Marriage Equality** in the US. What was first known as the "gay" liberation movement now encompasses all who identify as "queer", under an umbrella of acronyms including **LGBTQIA** (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual).

Stanford has **history** with the queer community:

- Did you know that Stanford has a sculpture in commemoration of the LGBTQ+ movement? Perhaps you've walked past the **pair of same-sex couples on a bench** next to the Main Quad without realizing it.
- How about the fact that Stanford became the first university to expand **student partner benefits** to include same-sex couples?
- What about the first trans person elected to the National Academy of Sciences? The late Stanford Professor **Ben Barres** both enhanced our understanding of
the brain through his research on glial cells and furthered the visibility of the LGBTQ+ STEM community as an openly transgender scientist, where he spoke up for other marginalized groups and worked tirelessly to mentor young scientists.

Although the US and institutions like Stanford are supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, and equal rights have been achieved in some realms, there is still work to be done. A recent study in *Science Advances* showed that students belonging to the LGBTQ+ community were 8% less likely to continue pursuing a STEM degree compared to their heterosexual peers. Like other minoritized groups, this leaky pipeline leads to a lack of diversity within STEM especially at higher levels. There is also reduced visibility of queer scientists, as many academics and professionals remain in the closet given societal stigma and discrimination.

This month, we remember the contributions of LGBTQ+ persons despite this identity being hidden either for self-preservation or left out of the history books. And in solidarity, we echo the words of The Stanford Black Postdoctoral Association for our path forward: "As the future of the Academy, postdocs are instrumental in shaping the “New Guard” of the professoriate. We must strive to make visible the contributions of members in our respective fields that may have been obscured by prejudice or bigotry to ensure our Academy is reflective of all members."

We hope that you will join us in celebrating pride this month! Although there is not an official "Stanford Pride" event, there are many groups and events on campus available to postdocs who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Keep an eye out for the upcoming June SURPAS Mailer for more information and events.

Yours in celebration of diversity, equality, and inclusion,

SURPAS and the Stanford LGBTQ+ Postdocs Group

PS: Even if you do not identify as part of the queer community, there are many ways to show your support and be an ally during Pride Month. You can find a rainbow or trans flag/pin/sticker and wear it or put it up in your office (hint: there are free ones available in the Firetruck House), take a safe zone training, or just share what you've learned here with someone you know. And one of the easiest things an ally can do is ask about and respect people's personal pronouns. All of these simple gestures can have huge impact, and are great first steps to being a conscious and active ally!

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Stanford LGBTQ+ Resources and Groups for Postdocs

- Queer Student Resources [Website](https://queer.stanford.edu/communities)
- LGBTQ+ Postdocs [Mailing List](https://mailinglists.stanford.edu/mailman/listinfo/lgbtq-postdocs)
- oSTEM (out in STEM, welcoming non-STEM folks too) [Website & Email](https://mailinglists.stanford.edu/mailman/listinfo/ostem)
- GradIQ (welcomes postdocs in addition to grad students) [Mailing List & Facebook](https://mailinglists.stanford.edu/mailman/listinfo/gradiq)
- Trans& (group for trans students, postdocs, faculty, and staff) [Mailing List](https://mailinglists.stanford.edu/mailman/listinfo/trans)
- Stanford LGBTQ Medical Education Research Group [Website](https://queer.stanford.edu/communities)

...and more (see [https://queer.stanford.edu/communities](https://queer.stanford.edu/communities) for full list)

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SURPAS snippets

**Logo Contest**
Calling all creatives! SURPAS is 20 years old and in need of a new ’do. Winner gets $100! [Final call: Submit your design here](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JkZLJziM32dXr3oF2sJcIjIzjRt6BQ_4/view).

**Elections**
We’re looking for new leaders! SURPAS will hold annual elections in June and we have lots of spots to fill: co-chair, advocacy coordinator, events coordinator, operations
manager, financial officer, communications coordinator, social media/web manager. Here is the description of all open positions. Email us for info or to nominate yourself /someone else.

NPA
The yearly National Postdoctoral Association meeting is the place to see and be seen in the postdoc advocacy circuit. Our own Anand and Ioana represented us well! Check out their posters.

We did it! $$$
Cheers to a much-needed salary bump! We have lots of amazing allies and advocates to thank, including Vice Provost Patti Gumport, OPA's Sofie Kleppner, and all the dedicated SURPAS-ians behind the scenes. And YOU! Our work is far from over - but we’re on the right track. Take a minute to give yourself a pat on the back - then start to imagine what else we can achieve together! Join a SURPAS committee and keep fighting the good fight!

That's a wrap
It’s been a busy couple months for you social butterflies! We hope you had as much fun as we did at our our Family Festival (180 attendees!), our first ever SURPAS Ball (embarrassing pics here), and our annual Spring Social. Thanks for making all these events friendly and fantastic! Feedback for next year?

SURPAS <3
Cheers to our own Abby and Huy on their recent marriage! Abby and Huy have both been amazing contributors to SURPAS and we wish them many years of happiness together!

Bounce bounce, bounce bounce
Did you know we now have 3, count em 3, casual (free!) ways to kick/toss/hit a ball around with your fellow postdocs? Check out our weekly pickup schedule and keep an eye on our calendar for info and updates! Basketball: Thurs 5:30pm, MSOB info
Soccer: Fri 4pm, Sandhill Fields info
Volleyball: Sat 9am, ACSR info

Prepared by the SURPAS Communications Committee www.surpas.org