



CCIS NOTES

November/December 2025

CCIS volunteers continue to serve international graduate students, visiting scholars and their families at Stanford University. Read about some of our programs and events!



"Notes at the Top"

Jeff Greenwald - President of CCIS

A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle

Several families are leaving Stanford this December 2025 and going back to their home countries of Spain, China, Korea, Taiwan, France, and Denmark. These are students and spouses and families who have been with us (CCIS and Bechtel) for a short period of several months or up to several years.

These (mostly) spouses and families have contributed to building their own community here at Stanford, but they have also helped build OUR community here at Stanford as well. We as volunteers have assumed that our purpose is to help these international families create a community here at Bechtel for THEM. And while we have been successful at doing exactly that, the sadness and emptiness that we feel is because we are losing part of OUR community, that these families have themselves contributed to helping build for US. Our selfishness is because we feel they have become part of our community, and their returning home is our own community loss.

Another way to think about these departures, is that our community is expanding globally. Our candles, lighting theirs, is illuminating the global community of CCIS and Bechtel and Stanford, beyond what we could make happen alone by ourselves. Our candles are lighting candles that will illuminate even more candles across the globe.

What a beautiful image, one candle beginning to light even more candles, and yet none of us loses anything in the process.

Friendship becomes community and community begets understanding..... and then enlightenment. Our appreciating other human beings, from different cultures and different religions and different backgrounds, changes both of us.

May the new year of 2026 be a year of illumination, and enlightenment, and understanding, and of community building beyond our own villages and towns.

Happy new year!

Jeff Greenwald
President, CCIS
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**Thanks for being a part of CCIS and supporting our
International Community at Stanford.**

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Dolly Verplank, Oscar Merino, Kumud Jain, and Gwyn Dukes

A thankful farewell from Oscar Merino

From the very first moment I walked through the door of the *International Spouses Coffee*, my family and I received an extraordinary warm welcome from both the volunteers and the CCIS leadership, embracing us and making us feel part of the community from day one.

As an international spouse, I must say that Bechtel and CCIS provided us with countless opportunities to make our stay truly unforgettable. Through courses, workshops, and social activities, they helped us feel part of the Stanford community from the very beginning.

These activities allow spouses to have their own meaningful occupations from the start, to learn the language and American culture, and to feel useful—helping to overcome homesickness and turning this experience into something unique and incredible.

All of this would be extremely difficult to achieve if families had to find these opportunities on their own from the beginning, without the support of organizations such as CCIS and Bechtel, which make these programs possible.

During my stay at Stanford, I have seen how students are able to fully focus on their projects because their spouses and children are involved in a community where they feel happy and valued. You truly give meaning to our stay here.

This strong sense of belonging to the international student community and to Stanford grew within me, inspiring me to volunteer from the very first moment and welcome new members, so they could receive the same warmth and support that we did. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate as a volunteer.

The values and human quality with which the CCIS leadership and volunteers dedicate their time and embrace the international community in every activity are truly memorable.

For all these reasons, I can only express my deepest gratitude for everything you do for us, making us feel part of a great family even when we are far from home.

I will never forget what you have done for us, and I will always feel part of CCIS, Bechtel, and Stanford.

Sincerely,

Oscar Merino and family

SEF grants awarded



On December 4 the **Spouse Education Fund** gave 31 grants to spouses and partners from 23 countries. Four recipients were men, the other 27 were women. The grants are intended to provide spouses with encouragement and financial support to take a class or to pursue a personal or professional interest. The SEF program was started forty years ago.

Most grant recipients will take courses through the Stanford Continuing Studies program. Courses chosen will cover a wide range of topics from those related to AI, ceramics and Project Management. Nine will take courses in business-related topics.

The recipients were asked to come forward to receive the envelopes containing their grant certificates. Each introduced themselves, sharing their name, country and the way they plan to use their grant. The grant presentation was attended by the partners and families of the grantees. The air was full of excitement and gratitude for the opportunity that will enable spouses to pursue their professional and personal interests while they are at Stanford.

Annual Holiday luncheon tradition

A well attended holiday luncheon was enjoyed by volunteers, board members, Bechtel staff and program participants. Held at Michael's restaurant in Mountain View, the event provides those attending the opportunity to learn more about the programs offered by CCIS.



This year **Shalini Dev Bhutani** (Executive Director of Bechtel), shown on the left, and **Elsa Gontrum** (Associate Executive director of Bechtel), shown on the right, received a special recognition, as both are retiring from their positions at Bechtel at the end of the year. Both expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to help students and for the CCIS programs. As Elsa cleverly phrased it - "**I hear you**" (participants practicing their language skills), "**I see you**" (those attending the Wednesday Morning Coffee) and "**I smell you**" (Global Chefs preparing savory meals).

The luncheon concluded with three guest speakers, all spouses who have participated in CCIS programs.

Each left their careers in their home countries to accompany their spouses as they pursue opportunities at Stanford.



Samira Davarfara (Iran)



Suki Hung (Taiwan)

Bob Jones was recognized for his efforts as a volunteer for CCIS. He was an *English in Action* volunteer for 30 years. Tragically, Bob passed away just a week after the lunch.

Also recognized was **Bob Paugh**, who earned " *Volunteer of the Year*". Bob has served on the board, been active in various groups and leads cooking classes.

Two spouse participants were interviewed by Jeff Greenwald- **Jeanette Atach** (Argentina), shown on the left and **Van Vu Kieu** (Viet Nam), shown on the right.



Both gave heartfelt accounts about the support they received from CCIS programs.



Shiori Kawaii (Japan)

Each described the loneliness and isolation they felt when first arriving at Stanford. But that changed when they learned about CCIS. All were grateful for the sense of community they have been able to develop with the help of programs offered through CCIS.

A word from the editor

As the newsletter editor, I hope you will enjoy learning more about what's happening at CCIS. Your feedback is welcome--send an email to notes@ccisstanfordu.org.

Pamela Baird

CCIS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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