

Defusing the Nuclear Threat: Stanford as a pocket of nuclear sanity?

This is a summary of the kick off meeting for the project, held Wednesday, January 20, 2010. Fourteen students met with Prof. Martin Perl (Nobel Laureate in Physics) and me at my home on campus. About five more want to be involved, but could not attend and will be updated via this summary, along with students who join us later. Prof. Kenneth Arrow (Nobel Laureate in Economics) and Stanford's President Emeritus Donald Kennedy could not attend, but sent messages of support.

Our goal on campus has two phases. First, we need to recruit a core group of about 30 students who can be counted on to attend most events as well as bring friends. That commitment is all that's required to be a member of the core but, as described on the page, there's more you can do if you have the time and interest.

I, and others who are happy to speak even if only a small number of students show up, will give talks in dorms and have other "mini-events" until the core group reaches that level. Then we can start holding larger events.

In both phases, students who agree that there is an urgent need to reexamine our nuclear posture will be asked to get at least two new people involved in the project. If we can achieve that kind of growth, we can reach the several hundred students needed for a tipping point within a year. What might happen next is described on our [web site](#).

The students who attended were enthusiastic and thought that the first goal – recruiting the core group of 30 – could be accomplished by the end of Winter quarter. If so, we could move into the second phase in the Spring. Originally, I had thought we would need both quarters to recruit the core group, but if we can maintain the level of enthusiasm that I saw on Wednesday, the earlier estimate will be very achievable.

An unsolicited gift of \$7,500 to support this project came in unexpectedly the week before, so we have some money to accelerate the process. Providing food, as at Wednesday's meeting, certainly helps, and you are encouraged to suggest other ways these funds can help accelerate the process.

There's no guarantee of success, especially on such an audacious project. But with the energy and enthusiasm that were present Wednesday, I'm very optimistic. And, as I told the students, I've swung at some wild pitches and connected for "[fool home runs](#)" twice before. The [suggestions](#) page also notes an applicable precedent in Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's pioneering work.

Two students are looking into using Facebook to help announce our events. Another is looking into the possibility that fraternities and sororities might play a role, and someone suggested setting up a table in White Plaza – once the rains stops.

Thanks very much for your interest and support. Working together we can do this!

[Martin Hellman](#)

Member, National Academy of Engineering
Professor Emeritus of Electrical Engineering

What Can I Do?

To be part of the core group:

Let me know you are willing to do that – I need to keep count to know where we stand. For the same reason, if you later have to pull out for a while, please tell me that too. I understand that other commitments might necessitate such a change. To be a member of this core group, all you need to be willing to do is:

- Come to at least several meetings a quarter, each lasting an hour or two. There will be more opportunities than that, but exams and similar commitments take priority. If you miss an important meeting, you'll be able to keep up with our plans via these updates and other means.
- Talk to your friends and see if they might be interested. Be sure to read the [suggestions](#) for increasing your effectiveness first. And, of course, read the [project description](#) if you haven't already. Each can be read in just a few minutes, but especially on the suggestions, it helps to come back and review them after you've had some experience interacting with others on this issue.
- If possible, also "Soaring, Cryptography and Nuclear Weapons." This will take 10 or 15 minutes, but will provide a firmer understanding of both the problem and the solution.

If you have time to do more:

See if your dorm or a student group to which you belong might be interested in hearing about the project. I'd be happy to come talk with them, even for a small group. With an initial goal of 30 core students, even adding one more makes a big difference.

We need to make flyers for events. Can anyone help do that?

A snappy name for our project would help. Is anyone interested in being part of a group to work on coming up with one?

We need to start planning the larger events including who would be the best speakers. Can anyone help?

Someone suggested a table at White Plaza. Is anyone interested in doing that (once the rain lets up)?

There are a large number of [resources](#) on the main web site for Defusing the Nuclear Threat. Is anyone interested in being part of a group to select the most useful so we can highlight them or pull them together in a booklet (preferably PDF)?

Certain parts of the original web site need to be edited to reflect the new focus on Stanford as a niche market. Can anyone help with that?