



FSILG LIFE AT MIT

Fraternalities, Sororities, and Independent Living Groups (FSILGs) are a major part of campus life at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The FSILG system includes 38 student chapters / organizations that are governed by four groups: the **Inter-Fraternity Council** (IFC), comprised of 26 men's social fraternities; the **Panhellenic Council** (Panhel), comprised of 6 women's sororities; the **Living Group Council** (LGC), comprised of 6 mostly coed non-Greek independent living cooperatives; and the **Association of Independent Living Groups** (AILG), which is an umbrella group that includes all undergraduate FSILG chapters and their alumni / alumnae volunteer management and advisory boards.

Some facts about the FSILG system at MIT (2011 figures):

- Fraternalities provided the first student housing at MIT. The first fraternity at MIT was founded in 1873, only a few years after MIT. This independent housing model and tradition remains strong today.
- 52% of the MIT undergraduate male student population is affiliated with a fraternity or independent living group, or about 1,200 men out of a total of 2,323 male undergraduates. This is among the highest percentages of fraternal affiliation on any campus in the country. Of this total, about 730 men live in a fraternity or independent living group residence.
- 36% of the MIT undergraduate female student population is affiliated with a sorority or independent living group, or about 700 women out of a total of 1,929 female undergraduates. Of this total, about 190 women live in a sorority or independent living group residence.
- AILG member organizations collectively own or independently manage about 35 residential buildings (several others are managed by MIT), with living capacity for approximately 1200 students and an asset value exceeding \$100,000,000. AILG member organizations house about 22% of the MIT undergraduate student population, along with several dozen MIT gradate and exchange students.

MISSION OF THE AILG

The Association of Independent Living Groups at MIT (AILG) will:

- Assist our member FSILGs to teach values and life skills that are complementary to the MIT educational curriculum.
- Be a presence at MIT, to represent and be a voice for the FSILG system and its alumni.
- Provide tools to improve our FSILG member groups.
- Promote diversity of choice of residence for students within the FSILG community.
- Promote FSILG group responsibility and accountability.



SOME KEY HOUSING FINDINGS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

By and large, the sorority system is healthy and growing; as a result, we excluded sororities from the following analysis, which focuses on the fraternities and independent living groups (ILGs). But the successes of the sororities should not be forgotten even while confronting the challenges of the fraternities and ILGs: 5 of the 6 sororities are incredibly healthy, dynamic, and successful organizations that greatly benefit campus life, especially for women.

The fraternities and ILGs are typically much older and have been residing in their properties for decades. We assumed a “typical” property to be a Back Bay fraternity or independent living group that has a legal occupancy of about 40 beds and a current occupancy of about 30 students, plus a resident advisor. It was built in the 19th century and has a total assessed property value of about \$1.5M.

First, the good news: **Despite common misconceptions, we believe the system can be stable at its current size.** The problem, in our view, is not too few male students joining fraternities and ILGs, but instead, that these organizations do not have realistic expectations for occupancy of their houses. Most groups are assuming (and budgeting for) a desired occupancy of 100 percent of legal capacity; we do not think this is reasonable based on a number of factors.

- The current aggregate fraternity and ILG occupancy is about 75 percent of legal capacity; our analysis suggests that somewhere between 70 and 80 percent is the optimal occupancy level. In other words, the typical property is at its ideal size.
- At legal capacity, the typical FSILG has 274 square feet of floor area per person vs. 444 square feet for the average residence hall. At 75 percent of legal capacity, each FSILG has about 364 square feet per person, much closer to the dormitory average.
- The fraternities (not including ILGs) need to recruit about 286 members per year (about 45% of the male population) to maintain 80 percent occupancy. This figure is closely aligned with actual results; the IFC has averaged around 290 new members per year.

Some more good news: **Several fraternities have recently demonstrated that it is possible to tap their alumni for the funds necessary to address many of the housing challenges we have identified.** In addition, the IRDF continues to play an important role in funding improvements and providing interim financing.

The bad news: **We have 21st century needs and 19th century buildings.**

- The typical fraternity and ILG houses about 30 students. **This is not an economic scale to provide today’s modern student infrastructure** (dining, GRTs, housekeeping services, desk security, IT support, etc.). FSILGs are inherently disadvantaged compared to on-campus residence hall support services in this regard.
- **FSILGs do not benefit from having faculty housemasters.**
- **Accessibility regulations are increasingly onerous.** For the typical FSILG, a \$400K improvement project may trigger the need for an elevator, wheelchair parking, ramps, accessible facilities, etc. Besides the capital costs (in excess of \$1M per property), these



features reduce usable living space and increase long-term maintenance cost, with very little obvious benefit to the students.

- **The deferred maintenance backlog is large and growing.** The typical FSILG needs to reserve about \$75K per year for capital improvements in order to maintain their buildings. To increase annual reserves to this level would require an increase in term bills of around \$2,000 per occupant per year. Our research indicates that this would be affordable, but many fraternities (and especially the ILGs) traditionally compete on price and resist increasing their term bills to reserve more.
- Many are instead opting to conduct major capital campaigns among their alumni, **but many groups may not have the alumni relations infrastructure or support to accomplish multi-million dollar campaigns.**
- Our research suggests that **the typical fraternity or ILG needs about \$3M of work to remain competitive** over the next 20 years. Recent renovations at PBE and Sigma Chi cost \$7M and \$5M respectively.

More bad news: **Today's students (and their parents) place a much higher value on amenity and a much lower value on independence and cost.**

- Our research suggests that **distance from campus is no longer seen as a positive benefit** for the Boston and Brookline organizations.
- **Physical conditions in older FSILGs are seen as an increasing impediment to recruitment and occupancy.** Many students choose to live on campus even after joining a fraternity.
- **Today's student cohort generally lacks the basic housekeeping and house maintenance skillset that previous generations possessed.** As a result, the traditional fraternity and ILG model, which relies on student labor for housekeeping and light maintenance and improvements, is broken. The typical fraternity or ILG is in substantially poorer condition than it was a generation ago, and not just because of deferred maintenance.
- As noted above, **many groups are competing on price**, even though this does not seem to be a driving issue for today's students.

Other things to consider:

- **The regulatory burden of operating an FSILG property has increased substantially over the past generation.** Additional municipal inspections and safety system maintenance requirements have added to the volunteer labor burden. Many alumni volunteers report feeling overwhelmed by the work required to meet basic municipal regulations. MIT and the AILG have instituted programs to help, but this issue is increasingly problematic.
- **Gentrification in the Back Bay puts the 25 organizations located there at risk.** While our students are responsible and respectful neighbors most of the time, there is an inherent tension between a collegiate lifestyle and that of our neighbors. As the Back Bay has gentrified, our neighbors are increasingly well-connected citizens who lack



tolerance for typical student behaviors and know how to use government to get what they want.

- **There has been a loss of adult presence in most of the Fs and Is over the years.** A generation ago, most had full-time cooks or other staff who provided at least some oversight. Now almost none do.
- **MIT is engaged in a multi-year effort to improve on-campus residential life.** Simmons Hall and Maseeh Hall are manifestations of this effort, with other residence hall renovations planned. As on-campus housing and dining improves, life in the FSILGs may look increasingly unattractive to many.
- **The junior year abroad is adversely affecting leadership in FSILGs.** As the number of students participating in international study increases, the number of potential leaders in our FSILGs is commensurately reduced (juniors provide most leadership in FSILGs). This is not a reason to discourage international study, but we need to recognize the pressure it creates.



STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVES AREAS REQUIRING MIT INVOLVEMENT

Many of the plan's major initiatives cannot be accomplished without significant involvement by – and often support from – the Institute. To successfully complete them, the following plan initiatives, listed in descending priority order, require the active participation by the Division of Student Life (DSL) or other MIT departments. Further, once these initiatives are underway, most will require sustained involvement and oversight by and follow-through from institutional staff to sustain the vitality of the FSILG community:

- Participating in and endorsing the MIT-FSILG Relationship Framework document, which includes expectations set forth for one another by the Institute, students, and alumni. (Initiative 2.1)
- Supporting the creation of and engaging with a future Orientation / Recruitment Review Committee to provide oversight and institutional guidance on the recruitment programs for the three student councils. (Initiative 4.1)
- Studying potential sites for the possible relocation of multiple FSILGs to new housing (a “Greek Village”) built on or near the campus. (Initiatives 3.1, 3.3, and 3.5, and perhaps also 3.4)
- Providing assistance with housing survey costs and administration to effectively evaluate the FSILG living option and offer an ideal student experience at MIT. (Initiative 3.1)
- Exploring how the campus dining program might be made more flexible to support off- and on-campus FSILG students. (Initiative 1.4)
- Supporting Faculty Advisor appointments to student governing councils in order to emphasize the importance of faculty involvement within the FSILG community. (Initiative 2.3)
- Considering an FSILG Housemaster or an equivalent role, to assure that FSILG students have access to the same faculty resources and assistance as those in the residence halls. (Initiative 2.3)