

Update from Bob Ferrara '67, Division of Student Life

February 2, 2012

Hello FSILG alums,

This is the winter edition of the semiannual message regarding MIT's Fraternity, Sorority, and Independent Living Group (FSILG) community. As is typical, there are successes and some setbacks to report. With our interest and support, these groups can continue to provide, for current and future generations of MIT students, the intense shared educational and personal development experience that we enjoyed.

I. FSILG Community Highlights

Recruitment Numbers Solid. The fall of 2011 was good for recruitment. On the IFC side, 321 new members accepted bids to 25 campus fraternities, up slightly from last year's totals. Overall 455 bids were offered to 369 men, so about 87 percent accepted. Given MIT demographics and the fact that MIT's dormitories are continually upgrading their living arrangements, this is an achievement - especially so since Maseeh Hall, which just opened this fall, really raises the bar on undergraduate accommodations.

The sororities have a different, very structured process, which is run by undergraduate Panhellenic Association officers. They do their best to match each interested woman with one of the six MIT sororities. This year, 173 women received bids, slightly fewer than last year. One virtue of this approach is that almost no one is left out. If you wish to affiliate, it is virtually certain you will do so. The six Independent Living Groups, which tend to have a more extended rush, do not submit their results in the aggregate, but four of the six did reasonably well.

There were some interesting technological twists to this year's IFC recruitment. A new "Clearinghouse Express" allowed the fraternities to check in freshmen by scanning their MIT ID cards. Per today's IFC rules, the fraternities must keep track of their visitors during what is - still - a very chaotic week. Also, for the first time, the IFC also offered a smartphone app for freshmen to use on their iPhone or Android. It showed the locations and events at each and every house. And quite a few chapters even developed their own individual apps.

FSILG Strategic Planning Effort. To remain relevant to future generations of MIT students, it is important for our FSILG community to periodically review and revitalize its role in the lives of MIT undergrads and alumni. To accomplish this task, an alumni-led committee is currently working on a strategic plan for the FSILG community. While overall membership numbers have been relatively stable for several years, the challenges in maintaining an outstanding living environment are growing, as our actively involved alumni know very well. With the encouragement of Dean for Student Life Chris Colombo and in parallel with a similar planning effort in his Division, the [Association of Independent Living Groups](#) (AILG) charged a team to develop such a plan, with a target of presenting it at June's AILG Annual Meeting. The purpose of the plan is to assist the FSILG community's leadership—students, alumni, and staff—to position the community over the next five years. In addition, it considers a much longer time horizon with regard to maintenance and management of the 38 independently owned or managed residential properties that collectively house nearly one quarter of all MIT undergraduates.

The strategic planning team, led by past AILG Chair and former Theta Xi National President Steve Baker '84, has jumped into the task in earnest. In the data gathering phase of the past several months, the team consulted with no less than 16 stakeholder groups to collect information and perspectives about the strengths and weaknesses of, and opportunities and threats to, the FSILG community. This process, which also serves to educate community partners, resulted in more than 1,000 documented comments or issues being generated. If nothing else, the group has indeed been thorough. The next phase is the formation five implementation "theme teams" at the student-alumni-staff retreat in early February. Each team will be charged to prepare a detailed, measurable, and time-specific roadmap to implement each of its initiatives.

MIT has a distinctive and unique FSILG community, which has been an important part of the Institute for more than a century. In 2003, MIT President Chuck Vest convened a task force to consider the status and future development of the FSILGs. The task force's report served as a starting point for this plan; the team has reviewed its recommendations and focused on building on them. In that sense, the 2012 FSILG Community Strategic Plan should be seen as a continuation of a decade's progress by the community's students, staff, and alumni volunteers. We expect great things from MIT, like an outstanding independent living group community. Stay tuned.

Pi Beta Phi Sorority to Move into 405 Memorial Drive. When MIT acquired 405 Memorial Drive, the former home of Alpha Tau Omega fraternity, in late 2010 Dean for Student Life Chris Colombo committed that the building would be offered for occupancy to the larger FSILG community. That promise has been kept. Pi Beta Phi, the newest sorority at MIT, will be moving into the building this coming August, in time for fall recruitment. Applications for the on campus building were solicited last summer for review by a committee comprised of MIT staff and FSILG alumni. Pi Beta Phi was the choice, especially given the chapter's "support from local and national volunteers, its focus on academics and community building, a solid judicial record, and a clearly articulated plan for recruitment and retention of members, and a detailed risk management plans".

Since its construction in the mid-1970s, 405 has never had a major renovation. It clearly needed the new windows, heating system, roof and parapets that have been installed over the past year. The building, situated between Kappa Sigma and Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternities, will be operated under a five-year agreement based the "Green Hall" model, developed for Kappa Alpha Theta sorority's residence in the former MIT dormitory at 350 Memorial Drive.

SAE Gains Full Chapter Status. This has been an eventful few months for Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity. For alums who graduated before 2000, SAE needs no introduction, because this chapter was always among the best on campus. The MIT SAE chapter was chartered on November 25, 1892, and will celebrate their 120th anniversary at MIT this fall. After closing the chapter in 1999 following a string of infractions, local alumni and the SAE national collaborated to restart a colony at MIT three years ago. This past summer the colony moved into Alpha Epsilon Pi's annex at 165 Bay State Road. Then on November 19, the Massachusetts Iota Tau Chapter of Sigma Alpha Epsilon was officially reinstated as a full chapter at MIT. Congratulations to the new SAE undergraduate brothers and the many dedicated alumni, led by Alumni Corporation President Hank Perritt '66, who made this possible. The alums also conducted a fundraising drive for renovations to the property and to ensure the new group is adequately capitalized. With 78 brothers quickly answering the call, the SAEs actually overshot their fundraising target. That's the kind of outstanding performance that has typically characterized this chapter! The only regret is that longtime SAE champion Bill Noz '57 could not be there. Bill passed away two months before. For his service and love to MIT and SAE, Bill was presented with a "Lifetime Service Award" by the AILG in May, 2010.

Pi Kappa Alpha Colony Closes. While we can report success in SAE's recolonization efforts; clearly having a large group of dedicated MIT alums was vital to that achievement. It is a much more difficult proposition to start a colony from scratch on this campus. From a Greek standpoint, this is one of the most fraternity-friendly campuses in the country and it is very prestigious to have a chapter here. So starting in the spring of 2010 with the strong support and manpower from their national, Pi Kappa Alpha gave it a good shot. Though they met with initial success, given the tough campus demographics and lack of committed local alums (contrary to the SAE situation), they could not sustain member interest. After an unsuccessful fall 2011 recruitment, the remaining undergraduate members of the Pi Kappa Alpha Colony petitioned the national headquarters to disband the colony.

Both the AILG and the IFC were supportive, and abided by National Interfraternity Conference (NIC) rules which state that all campuses should be open to new colonies. PKA's former chapter at MIT, the Independent Living Group "pika", was also welcoming. "pika" began as a PKA Chapter here back in 1969 but disaffiliated several years later over the issue of admitting women students into the chapter. This history is encapsulated in their (lower case) name of pika.

Recognizing FSILG Excellence. In the last installment, there was a section on the MIT awards presented annually to several of the 200+ alumni volunteers. A few of you wrote in to ask why their undergraduate honors were not also mentioned. Good suggestion. The list is quite long, and it was not yet available when the last message was sent. But now there is comprehensive list of [MIT FSILG Awards](#). Besides checking for their chapter's accomplishments, some of you may also want to nominate one of your own. In fact, the current selection group would love to include especially senior alums in the "Lifetime Achievement" category. Many of these have never been recognized for building and sustaining this remarkable community. Please feel free to nominate anyone by going [here](#). Please note you must do so by mid-April. In fact, if you are on or near campus next May 15, please come as our guests to the FSILG Awards Ceremony. It is inspiring to witness what these organizations and their leaders accomplish.

MIT chapters and individual volunteers are increasingly being recognized nationally as well. For example, the last installment noted that Phi Sigma Kappa had an exceptional productive year. A few weeks later, their undergraduate president, Jason Hoch '13, wrote in with the happy news that their National Convention had

chosen the MIT chapter for both the first ever Phi Sigma Kappa Outstanding Chapter House of the Year award, as well as overall Outstanding Chapter. Nice combination!

And just this past week, there was great news from Delta Psi, a storied MIT ILG, whose local chapter is known as the No. 6 Club, from its old Louisburg Square Boston address. Karen (Welch) Caswelch '84 of Delta Psi was elected as President of the national board of Saint Anthony Hall (the name of the national Fraternity of Delta Psi). This will be a significant milestone for Saint Anthony Hall, as Karen will be the first person of color to assume the presidency. But the MIT chapter is used to breaking new ground. Alumna Barbara Thornton '80 was the first ever women president of Saint Anthony Hall. And back in her undergraduate years when Delta Psi was an IFC member, she became the first (and only) woman to be IFC President. Now a successful architect in Rhode Island, Barbara still is active with her MIT chapter.

FSILGs Respond to the Community Service Challenge. Service is an integral part of MIT's mission and is also a core value of just about every one of our FSILGs. So when the MIT Public Service Center inaugurated the [FSILG&D Community Service Challenge](#) program last year, many chapters responded. The Challenge provides a structure to support dormitory and FSILG service initiatives and strengthen MIT's commitment to service. In 2011, the first-ever [Service Cup](#) was awarded to Sigma Alpha Epsilon for their local community partnerships with Habitat for Humanity, the Museum of Science and Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Congratulations! The 2012 Challenge focuses not only on service project details but asks for evidence of impact on the community and demonstration of learning. To kick off the Challenge, the Public Service Center hosted a photo contest. Phi Beta Epsilon took first place with their 70-person group, the largest college team, in the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure: Boston.

II. Alumni Achievements.

Younger Alums Seeking To Organize. The Strategic Planning effort will no doubt create several new volunteer roles and opportunities in months to come. A set of younger alums have also begun working with the AILG to form a new volunteer subcommittee, called AILG10. As the name implies, it is concerned with engaging and utilizing recent FSILG graduates from the past 10 years. The goal is to bridge the involvement gap that seems to open up right after graduation. The committee is initially charged with two primary tasks: 1) keeping recent alums engaged and connected, and 2) serving as an advisory board for, and AILG liaison to, the undergraduate FSILG governments (i.e. IFC, Panhel, LGC).

With leadership from Akil Middleton '08, the AILG10 is still forming and - although the charge is set - there is a lot of room for defining specific tasks. If you are interested in helping out--in any amount--please fill out this [GoogleDocs form](#) or contact Akil at aj.middleton@alum.mit.edu.

Phi Delt Alums Excel. Phi Delta Theta has been a strong fraternity at MIT for many decades, but this past fall was a truly exceptional time, even for them. Two of their alumni brothers made huge news splashes honoring their lifetime achievements. Both used the occasion to say how important the fraternity was in their success at MIT.

On October 4, Adam Riess '92, now a Physics Professor at Johns Hopkins University, was awarded the 2011 Nobel Prize in Physics for his team's discovery that the expansion rate of the universe is accelerating, a phenomenon widely attributed to a mysterious, unexplained "dark energy" filling the universe. One of his undergrad professors at MIT was Ed Bertschinger, now Department Head of Physics. Ed told The Tech that Adam was remarkably diligent, coming frequently to office hours until everything was clear to him. He was impressed by Riess's passion for learning and his involvement in Phi Delta Theta. "I gained a lot of respect for fraternities after seeing his commitment to them and seeing how the fraternity helped Adam organize his life at MIT," said Bertschinger. Incidentally, Adam is married to an MIT alumna, Nancy Schondorf, '93, who is a member of Alpha Chi Omega sorority. When Riess came to MIT to give a lecture a few weeks after receiving his prize, he told a packed house in 10-250 not only the story of the discovery but also what his fraternity experience meant to him.

A few weeks later, another Phi Delt, Andrew "Drew" Houston, '05, was featured on the cover and written about in four articles in [Forbes](#) magazine. Yes, the '05 year is right. He is a young man, but already "one of the next game changers, 100 entrepreneurs reinventing the world". He is a co-founder of Dropbox, the digital storage service that has surged to over 50 million users. One of the Forbes articles describes how he "draws strength from his fellow Phi Delt alums---he has even recreated the fraternity living experience in San Francisco, moving into the same downtown building as Smith and ten other entrepreneurs". The Smith referred to here is yet

another fraternity brother, Adam Smith '06, who founded another successful startup and inspired Drew. Drew has come back to MIT several times recently, and also gave the keynote presentation at MIT Greek Week last April. Congratulations to Drew and Adam both for their professional accomplishments and for being such great ambassadors for the MIT FSILG experience.

Milestone Anniversary for Kappa Alpha Theta. This past September, the MIT chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta celebrated their 20th anniversary at MIT. They have a lot to celebrate. Their members are very active on the MIT campus and in the Panhellenic Association. The local chapter was chosen for top honors in several categories at the National Convention. This is no small feat, as Kappa Alpha Theta is among the nation's oldest and largest sororities, currently numbering 170 chapters. So there is a lot of competition for their major awards. Key dates for "Theta", as the sorority is commonly abbreviated, and all our active FSILGs are maintained on this [FSILG history website](#). If you notice an addition or correction, please let me know. My contact information is at the end of the message.

Reunions for Sigma Alpha Mu and NRSA. Last year witnessed two reunions of venerable MIT organizations that have not existed for decades. Last summer the Non-Resident Student Association (NRSA)/5:15 Club hosted a joyful reception attended by over 40 NRSA alums (from as far away as Italy) - including the renowned Magliozzi brothers, Tom '58 and Ray '72, of "Car Talk" fame. The NRSA was once a very active commuter student organization, but ceased to exist by the mid-1980s. Then last fall another MIT group – which last existed in the early 1970s - organized another humdinger of a reunion.

Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity's reunion brought back over 65 SAMmie alumni and 55 wives and other guests from the classes of 1944 through 1973, when the fraternity deaffiliated and became today's Fenway House. One brother came all the way from Germany and was thrilled with the weekend long bash, with events at several Boston landmarks, plus the MIT Media Lab, the MIT Museum, the Koch Cancer Center, and the old fraternity house at 34 The Fenway in Boston. The Saturday formal dinner at the MIT Faculty Club was capped off by John Reed '61, Chairman of the MIT Corporation, as the keynote speaker. Former Alumni Association President Paul Rudovsky '66 was a major mover behind this extraordinary gathering. The SAMmies still claim one exceptional record in MIT annals; no other living group is likely to match their record of having five of their members serving simultaneously on the MIT Corporation. Besides Paul, this elite group includes Bob Muh '59, Art Samberg '62, Mark Epstein '63, and Bob Blumberg '64. Incidentally, the SAMmies have done an outstanding job at preserving their history and have worked closely with MIT Archives.

III. MIT News

FSILG Direct Donor Recognition at All-Time High. As those involved in running our FSILG Alumni House Corporations know, one cannot operate an FSILG in today's environment without some help from friends – like alumni donors. There are many variations of FSILG giving. Hundreds of us make a donation to the chapter's alumni corporation, typically forgoing tax-deductibility. Many others now give to their FSILG's capital campaign via the Society for the Preservation of Greek Housing. And many also give via MIT to the Independent Residence Development Fund (IRDF). All these contributions are vital to maintaining a healthy FSILG community. So MIT and the Alumni Association have sought to do an increasingly better job in recognizing the people who offer this help, just as they have done for contributions of volunteer time. Here are some details.

Three years ago, the MIT Alumni Association began the [FSILG Direct Donor Recognition program](#). The number of FSILGs choosing to participate has grown each year, and now stands at 25 chapters. These chapters reported that 1,594 alumni/ae donated directly to their chapters in the MIT fiscal year, which ended on June 30, 2011. Both numbers are high water marks. Every donor, for this and the two preceding fiscal years, is listed on the website. Direct donors who are also members of MIT's William Barton Rogers Society receive additional recognition in the Society's Annual Report. (You can read more about the Society [here](#)). Please remember the donor names are furnished by the Alumni Treasurers of each participating chapter. These Treasurers work hard, as we do, to make sure the lists are accurate and the donor wishes to be listed. However, if you do note an error, please let me or your Alumni Treasurer know and we will quickly correct it.

Alumni Association Inaugurates IRDF Donor Recognition. So, taking a page from the Direct Donor initiative above, this year the Alumni Association developed a new [IRDF Donor Recognition](#) website. Over 800 generous alumni/ae are now listed in this initial version of the site. Because their gifts are made through MIT, IRDF donors also receive all the usual benefits that come from making a gift to the Institute. Other than Unrestricted Gifts, the IRDF already has the broadest donor base of any MIT fund.

Let's hope this recognition helps in encouraging even more to donate. One special example of alumni generosity is that of Alpha Tau Omega fraternity. There is no question that many ATO alums are smarting from the IFC Judicial Committee's lengthy suspension from the MIT. Nonetheless the trustees of the chapter's scholarship fund made the generous and far-sighted decision to direct the fund's proceeds to the IRDF. We thank them for that and will remember this generosity when this distinguished chapter again becomes active on campus.

Soon the IRDF will be called on to help fund much higher capacity fiber optic computer network links connecting MIT to all the off-campus FSILG houses. Thanks to an earlier IRDF-funded, all the FSILGS have state-of-the-art wired and wireless within the houses, but – with the growing internet dependence – we are seeing the need for higher capacity external connections and, with the help of MIT's Information Services & Technology (IS&T) are planning direct fiber connections. This is becoming a necessity for the modern educational environment, and thus qualifies for IRDF grants.

Institute Happenings. With new Chancellor Eric Grimson PhD '80 coming on board, the MIT Community has been quite busy reevaluating and retooling various aspects of student life at MIT. In the academic MIT world, much of this work is customarily done by student, faculty, and staff committees, and now several key committees are in various stages of progress. I know alumni sometimes get nervous about such reviews, but my expectation is that MIT will reaffirm the things that already work well as well as identify new opportunities to create an even better student experience.

After a controversy surrounding the Phi Beta Epsilon sanctions last year, Chancellor Grimson organized an *Interfraternity Council Judicial Review Committee*. This group, which included representatives of the AILG, met throughout the semester and through the summer to review the peer student self-governance process of the Interfraternity Council. The IFC Judicial Process was reaffirmed and the overall [IFC bylaws](#) were enhanced to create an even stronger system of accountability. In the spring of 2011, the Chancellor also chartered a *Review Committee on Orientation*, to review current orientation practices including Residence Exploration (REX) and FSILG Recruitment. The group was given [this charge](#); the basic issue is that the orientation period is very long, much longer than any of our peer schools. This committee also included undergrad FSILG representatives and is expected to conclude its work later this spring with a set of consensus recommendations to the Chancellor and Deans. In fall 2011, the Chancellor created two additional Institute Committees, the *Committee on Student Support* and a *Campus Safety and Security Committee*. These latter two groups both have a rigorous meeting schedule and expect to conclude their work with recommendations in the current spring semester.

FSILG Office Update. The [FSILG Office](#), under the direction of Assistant Dean Marlena Martinez Love, is responsible for the oversight of all our FSILGs. This past semester, it gained a new home and a new face. After the departure of Lauren Davis Wotjkun, Assistant Director of FSILGs, this summer a national search was begun, resulting in Adam McCready arriving here from the University of New Hampshire. A graduate of George Washington University and Bowling Green State University, Adam is the main point of contact for all our sorority and independent living group chapters and their governing councils. Adam is a proud member of Theta Delta Chi and has recently rotated off as National President for the fraternity. The FSILG Office was housed for years on the top floor of the MIT Student Center. Now with the consolidation of all the residential life operations of the Division of Student Life into [Building W59](#), the old Heinz building just down Vassar Street, the FSILG Office relocated there as well. They still love visitors every bit as much, and for alumni the parking is much easier. Please stop in!

Living Pink Survey. Because of the diversity of MIT's student body, MIT's living groups have often been at the forefront of welcoming minority groups. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, our fraternities extended the welcome mat to blacks and Asians, well ahead of their national offices. Today these groups are essential to the community here, providing great leaders and members. More recently, along with the larger society, MIT has become more supportive and respectful of those with different sexual orientations. But there is still room to improve, according to a recent study on MIT residential community inclusiveness of lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender and queer individuals. The [Living Pink Guide](#), produced by [LBGT@MIT](#), was created to help undergraduate students find dorms, independent living groups, fraternities, and sororities that are welcoming to lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and queer individuals. Data collection took place April-May 2011 via a web-based survey and results were analyzed during summer 2011. Overall the MIT response rate was 30.2% (1297) of the undergraduates, a very healthy sample.

MIT Staff Active with the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors In December, several of our FSILG Office professional staff attended the AFA Annual Meeting in St. Louis. AFA is a professional association for

campus-based advisors, inter/national organizations and advocates of the fraternity and sorority movement. While there, our group hosted a breakfast for representatives from each of the national groups represented on the MIT campus. One highlight was the “focus group” led by alum Steve Baker '84, as part of the FSILG Strategic Plan mentioned in the first section of this message. This breakfast served as an opportunity for not only educating the national organizations about the MIT community but also for having more open and clear lines of communication.

The FSILG Office staff are very active in the AFA. This annual meeting included the re-election of Cat Sohor as Region I (New England) Director. Cat, who is the FSILG Office advisor to all our fraternities, also presented a session entitled, “The Female Fraternity Advisor,” with two of her colleagues from Tufts University and The Gorge Washington University. The Fraternal Information Programming Group (FIPG) recognized Cat as the 2011 Campus Professional of the Year. Adam McCready, Cat’s FSILG Office counterpart, works with MIT’s ILGs and sororities. Adam was elected to serve as a representative for Region I on the AFA Nominations and Elections Committee. Mary Wislowski, a graduate intern in the FSILG Office, completed the trifecta. She was named the winner of the Order of Omega case study competition for second year graduate students.

MIT Hosts National Expert and New England Greek Summit. Relying on these national professional connections, the FSILG Office invited Kim Novak, a nationally renowned expert in student-focused risk management, hazing prevention and campus safety to MIT. Basically, she showed how we can better create a community of care for all members of the MIT community. Kim (no, not Kim Novak the famous 1950’s actress!) was on campus for five days, meeting with athletic coaches, fraternity and sorority leaders, individual chapters, and presenting in several forums. An [MIT News article](#) provides more details.

Kim concluded her productive October visit with a keynote lecture at the New England Greek Summit, which was hosted by MIT. This event, planned collaboratively with Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) and the [Northeast Greek Leadership Association](#) (NGLA), hosted over 135 students from nine campuses across New England for the first ever New England Greek Summit. This gathering aimed to develop relationships among fraternity and sorority members from across New England, and to gain knowledge on best practices to develop a strategic plan and vision. One participant noted that the New England Greek Summit was “a great reminder of basic values and the responsibility we have to our sisters and brothers.” Given the success of this conference, more like it are in the offing for the future.

An Impromptu Memorial at Mass. Ave and Vassar St. I feel compelled to mention this sad story because it happened right outside the door of the building where I work, in the early evening late last December. A young alum, Phyo Kyaw '10, was killed riding his bicycle as a big oil tanker truck made a sweeping wide turn on the corner of Mass. Ave. and Vassar St. Phyo was a member of Sigma Nu, much beloved by his fraternity brothers and apparently everyone else who knew him. Within hours of the accident, an impromptu memorial was assembled at the corner, complete with flowers, candles, and a white-painted bike. The memorial silently stands there today still, over a month later. Many MITers, like me, pass it every day and think about this tragedy of a promising young man. He was loved and made many friends here, though he came to MIT from halfway across the globe. He was from the country of Myanmar, or Burma as it was formerly known. Thanks to *The Tech* for this [article](#) and the photo of the memorial.



And thanks for all you do!

Alumni are absolutely essential to the continued health and vitality of MIT’s FSILG community. Your continued help is deeply appreciated, whether it is connecting with other alums, advocating for your chapter and the FSILG community, doing valuable volunteer work, or helping financially. With this sustained effort, we will indeed continue to have among the very best and most varied college residence communities in the nation.

Sincerely,
Bob Ferrara '67
Senior Director, Strategic Planning, Communications, and Alumni Relations
Division of Student Life, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

NB: This message and all prior e-mails in this series can be found on the [FSILG Archive](#) on the Division of Student Life web site.