

Update from Bob Ferrara '67, Division of Student Life

January 28, 2010

Hello FSILG alums,

This is our semiannual message regarding MIT's Fraternity, Sorority, and Independent Living Group (FSILG) community. Your support ensures these groups will continue to provide - for current and future generations of MIT students - the intense shared educational and personal development experience that we enjoyed. Today's challenges offer many opportunities for your help.

I. FSILG Community Highlights

This past term was marked by notable successes and at least one serious setback:

Recruitment Numbers Up. Fall recruitment was outstanding for both the men's and women's groups. The 26 fraternities welcomed 303 new members, posting the highest total since 2001 and barely eclipsing another banner year back in 2006. The six sororities handily surpassed all previous years by inducting 193 new women. This record was due in part to the first full year of operation by the newest sorority, Pi Beta Phi. Almost all of these new members are freshman, and now 49% of undergraduate males are affiliated with a fraternity or independent living group. The comparable percentage for undergrad women is 38%; both of these figures are all-time highs for MIT FSILG affiliation.

Alpha Tau Omega Closure. After a long and painful judicial process, the Alpha Tau Chapter was closed early last fall. The Interfraternity Council found the chapter responsible for serious violations of the IFC risk management policy. Based on a prior agreement between ATO and the voting members of the IFC, the violation led immediately to an organizational expulsion for a 10 year period. After an appeal was heard and denied in September, the chapter house at 405 Memorial Drive was vacated. This series of events is difficult for everybody, especially the ATO alums. They have received much more detailed accounts from the ATO alumni officers.

Alumni leader Ernie Sabine (Student House '66) expressed what many were feeling, "I hope all of us in the IFC, AILG and greater MIT community continue to remember ATO's long history at MIT, its good fraternal life, work and deeds in the past and the many valued ATO alums who continue to be contributors to life at MIT. It is my sincere hope that ATO may rejoin MIT's fraternal community at some future time. To that end, I encourage all of you to continue to extend a welcoming hand to all ATO alums and I encourage all ATO alums to continue to be an active part of the AILG and MIT communities". For an update on the possible re-use of the house, please see the "MIT News" toward the end of this message.

Accreditation Program Receives Top National Award. The flagship program of the [Association of Independent Living Groups](#) (AILG) is the alumni-run [Accreditation Program](#). This peer review effort, based on an academic Visiting Committee model, has been in development for six years now and recorded some 88 full scale visits, at least one to every one of MIT's FSILGs. As mentioned in the last semiannual message, the program has now matured to the point where it is used, in difficult cases, to introduce needed interventions by MIT professional staff. The fact that the program is run entirely by alumni is a real source of strength; and – to the best of our knowledge – unique in the country.

Kaya Miller, Assistant Dean of the FSILG Office, encouraged its nomination for national recognition. The AILG concurred and this past December the Association of Fraternity Advisors – the premier professional organization for fraternity and sorority professionals – recognized the Accreditation Program as a finalist for the "Excellence in Programming Award". The [presentation](#) at the AFA conference gathered lots of interest. Those who have participated in the peer review find the experience very useful, very thorough process to get the sense of how each FSILG runs, its special history, and what is important today.

Division of Student Life Visiting Committee. A major feature of the Institute's governance is the [MIT Corporation Visiting Committees](#), of which there are 31 in total. Every two years each major department hosts its Visiting Committee. The Division of Student Life (DSL) committee met for two full days in early November and

extensively reviewed all aspects of the division's operations, including the FSILGs. The DSL committee includes a number of extraordinary individuals from industry and academia, each of whom brought something special to this work. This year's committee was chaired by Ken Wang '71, current President of the Alumni Association Board and a Phi Kappa Sigma alumnus. Eight other members have deep ties to MIT's FSILG community and five others have national reputations in student affairs, so these people know what is at stake.

In their 2007 visit report, the DSL Visiting Committee was encouraged by the steps made in stabilizing the FSILG system. In 2009, the Committee saw continued progress, despite the national economic difficulties affecting MIT and all of us. Although there was not time for the committee to visit every FSILG, the group did manage visits to Kappa Alpha Theta's new quarters in Green Hall and a trip to Kappa Sigma, hosted by incoming IFC chair Ryan Schoen '11 and KS alums. They also met with numerous students, alumni, and staff involved in the FSILG community. The Committee not only appreciated the gains by the FSILGs but also liked the deepening involvement of alumni, a key to sustaining our entire community.

II. Alumni Achievements.

AILG Transitions Key Officers. At the summer board meeting, the AILG elected Ernie Sabine '66 as the new chair, succeeding Steve Baker '84, who has been a superb leader for the previous three years. Steve remains on the board and also serves on the Student Life Visiting Committee. As Student House alum, Ernie is the second AILG Chair from an ILG and also brings a lot of practical MIT knowledge. As AILG Treasurer, Jim Bueche '62 did yeoman's work on the incorporation of the AILG as a 501(c)(4) non-profit corporation and in building a solid financial base. He continues on the board and chairs the AILG's Insurance committee, and is now succeeded as Treasurer by Sara Pierce '03 of Sigma Kappa. Stan Wulf '65 of Phi Delta Theta remains as Vice-Chair, and Rich Possemato '01 of Nu Delta is the new Secretary.

MIT Provides National Leadership. One of the reasons our AILG officers are so effective is the wider perspective they bring to our MIT situation. For example, Steve Baker has been the national president of Theta Xi, while Stan Wulf and Sara Pierce Phi Delta Theta and Sigma Kappa respectively as regional officers. As in other enterprises, MIT alumni are often called on for leadership roles in the national Greek world. So I've started to keep a running list of national (or international) fraternity and sorority officers with MIT roots.

Laura Malley Schmitt '86 is Alpha Phi's international president and, calling on her analytical MIT training, was the author of the Panhellenic Association's algorithm for campus recruitment. And for Alpha Chi Omega sorority, Katie Evanco Brown '93 has served as national Vice President. Incidentally both of these women are married to MIT fraternity alums. Jim Thompson '79 has held multiple national offices in Theta Chi, as Mike Feinstein '82 does now for Beta Theta Pi. And this year we learned that MIT Sloan grad alumnus Joe Gilman '90 was elected to Sigma Nu's highest leadership post. He has good company, as Duane Dreger '99 also serves in a national appointed role for the fraternity. This list of MIT people who contribute nationally is a work in progress, so if you know a brother or sister who should be on it, please let me know.

IAP Courses Evolve. This January has seen another increase in the number of students and alumni attending the [alumni-run courses](#) offered during IAP (Independent Activities Period). Somewhere around 120 are attending the six course offerings this year. These courses have proved to be an effective way to pass knowledge of chapter operations to incoming officers, and now among alumni themselves. One of the more popular is House Manager 101, which this year included the Boston Fire Department's Captain Al Cushing. As one in charge of overseeing municipal fire inspections in all our Boston houses, Captain Cushing has a long and important connection with our community. At one point in his presentation he noted that "The houses that I see working best and well kept are exactly those where alumni are most involved". This observation is very much shared by MIT and most of the others involved in the FSILG community.

Lifetimes of Service. Most of us are in position to help our old MIT living groups occasionally at best. There are a few notable exceptions, like Bruce Wedlock '56, who was the proud recipient of a plaque in honor of his 50 years of volunteer service to his beloved Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity. The MIT Alumni Association featured a [picture](#) of Bruce on their web site. He was not even the longest-serving volunteer in the photo! That honor goes to Bill Denhard '42, who is still very active in the PKS House Corporation. Bill and Bruce have also worked often on behalf of all of us. Bruce authored the house manager's manual now used as a bible in the annual IAP course presented by alumni for undergraduate house managers. Along with Bob Greene '55, who passed away last year, they coauthored an influential 2002 white paper advocating specific action by MIT to sustain MIT's FSILG community.

Key Role of the AILG. The [Association of Independent Living Groups](#) (AILG) has undergone two rechartering exercises since it assumed the alumni coordinating role for the FSILG community. Each time, the organization has gained new momentum, both in the breadth of its program offerings and in its advocacy for FSILGs to MIT and other key partners, such as the local municipal organizations. This volunteer-run group has also taken on – in whole or in part – several administrative tasks that were formerly performed by MIT staff. Since these additional missions have accrued over the past several years, it is worthwhile to recap them for a complete picture. The major programs of the AILG include:

- Accreditation. This is nationally recognized peer review program described earlier.
- Safety, Licensing, & Inspection. This program provides professional assistance in addressing municipal safety requirements. This assistance includes a comprehensive database to track relevant documentation as well as on-the-ground help from a Building Safety Facilitator (BSF). Tom Stohlman '76 of Kappa Sigma assumed this BSF role this year. A trained architect familiar with the issues, Tom is well suited to the role. Boston & Cambridge authorities have been extremely pleased as well.
- Education. The AILG hosts periodic get-togethers plus a set of intensive courses during January.
- Purchasing. A separate purchasing organization, the FSILG Cooperative, was created by the AILG in 2003 and it is now the third largest such collegiate cooperative in the country.

In addition, the AILG provides support and guidance to MIT area as requested, such as the IRDF Grant Advisory Board, Insurance Administration, Information Systems, the Resident Advisor Working Group, and the Summer Resident Policy Group. The AILG also provides management and oversight of major initiatives. For example, the AILG IT Committee has overseen the project to equip all FSILGs with state-of-the-art computer networks. The AILG Facilities Committee, with help from MIT, is in the process of producing evacuation route diagrams in response to new municipal requirements. The AILG [Annual Report](#) is one place to get a sense of the scope of the organization's activities. A new set of [goals](#) has been developed for the coming year. Most of the actual work is now accomplished by one of the six committees, but deciding what needs to be done typically occurs in one the four annual town-meeting-style plenary sessions or the monthly board meetings. All told, some sixty volunteers – mostly local – are involved in AILG work, beyond the 200+ alumni who are directly involved with their FSILGs. There is always room for more.

III. Building Stronger Chapters.

Shared Vision Retreat. Based on the success of the initial session last year, the FSILG Office is again sponsoring a day long “Shared Vision” retreat. MIT staff, alumni leaders, and the officers of the major student governing groups will be meeting next week at MIT's Endicott House. Last year one result was a much better awareness and understanding of each group's interests and goals. These will be reaffirmed, with additional identification of programs and collaborative efforts to ensure the vibrancy of FSILG life within the Division of Student Life at MIT.

MIT Chapters Receive National Recognition. This September the Alpha Chi Omega national president came by the MIT chapter house last September with a very pleasant surprise. She presented the alumnae and undergraduates with the “National Council Trophy”, the distinguished “chapter of the year” award for the Sorority. Our Kappa Sigma chapter also continues to thrive, receiving not only MIT's Reid Weedon '41 Award for Alumni Relations but their national's own “Founder's Award for Chapter Excellence”. We suspect that there are more MIT chapters garnering recognition from inter/national organizations; if yours can be counted among them, please share this news with me.

SAE achieves IFC Colony Status. Sigma Alpha Epsilon, better known as SAE, had a local chapter that was closed in 1999 but is now showing the way on re-establishing an MIT presence. With the support of SAE national and an active group of alumni, students recruited a small but cohesive new group of undergrads, who were formally granted colony status by the IFC early this fall. This was cause for a celebration that brought in alums from as far away as Arizona. Next week this same group of young men will be inducted as the first SAEs from MIT in a decade – cause for further celebration. Many of you may remember that SAE was a strong chapter for most of its prior MIT history, spanning from 1892 until 1999, when the alumni corporation closed the chapter.

More Building Renewal & Chapter Fundraising. Even in these difficult times, more chapters have been initiating building renewal projects and studies. Access to low cost IRDF loans and responsive contractors are important factors, but the key ingredients in any renewal are always alumni volunteer oversight and alumni donor generosity. Chi Phi is well along on a major \$1.6M renovation of its magnificent chapter house. Theta Chi completed renewal of its HVAC infrastructure and renovation of all common areas this past summer, with more

work planned for this coming summer. Both Phi Beta Epsilon and Sigma Chi are planning major reconstruction in the next few years. All of these efforts require major fundraising and much this money goes directly to the FSILG. Nonetheless the MIT Alumni Association is helping where it can. Not only is staff support provided but also this year a new [FSILG Donor Recognition](#) page was created on the Association's site.

Computer Network Upgrades Completed. Here's a renewal effort that touched every one of the 41 FSILG-occupied building. The Community Network Upgrade Project ensured that all FSILGs now have a state-of-the-art wired and wireless computer networks. This is a major milestone, completed well ahead of similar efforts in MIT's residence halls. These conversions require extensive planning and funds. Thanks go to the AILG's IT-Telecomm Committee for managing the whole process in collaboration with MIT's IS&T staff. A smaller-scale community program, the conversion to radio based fire alarm communication systems, is now about 2/3 complete. Both have been financed by alumni contributions to MIT's [Independent Residence Development Fund \(IRDF\)](#).

As much-needed modernization and deferred maintenance issues are addressed, the IRDF is key to our community's future, so its fund capital must be preserved. A [new procedure](#) ensures there will be sufficient funds to meet projected needs for IRDF Project Grants. These grants are the difficult-to-forecast element in the IRDF environment. This past November nine chapters applied for Project Grants in the current fiscal year; all were approved in the full amount. We hope our alumni donations permit the same in all future years. In any event, future project grant awards will depend on how much is available and the giving history of the chapter alumni.

IV. MIT News

Two Important Peer Reviews Concluded. Oversight and support of the FSILG community is the responsibility of the Division of Student Life, now headed by Dean Chris Colombo. In the last installment of this message, we reported on Dean Colombo's efforts to get to know our community better, while coping with steep and unanticipated budget cuts, a University Accreditation, and the division's Visiting Committee. These reviews are now completed and both went very well. Months of preparation preceded both reviews, requiring much of the Dean's time. As mentioned above, the Visiting Committee is an every two year event. The Accreditation Review is a once-a-decade process, required of every higher education institution in the land must be accredited. In MIT's case, the accrediting body is the [New England Association of Schools and Colleges or \(NEASC\)](#). The NEASC group was deeply impressed by the vitality and inclusiveness of the FSILG community and the strides we have made since the last review.

Now with these two major efforts behind him, Dean Colombo can begin to fully engage the challenges that attracted him here from Columbia. He will be attending the April AILG session, for example. As a House Master at Next House, he also hopes to involve fellow House Masters and faculty in general in developing even more effective living-and-learning environments across MIT. This is increasingly important now as far fewer of today's MIT faculty were MIT undergraduates and thus do not fully understand the distinctive character of our FSILGs.

Admissions Office Connection. Just as we need faculty to understand better the special opportunities and character of our dormitories and FSILGs, the Admissions Office personnel also need some familiarity when they represent MIT to prospective freshman. We are fortunate the new Dean of Admissions, Stu Schmill '86, is a "MIT lifer" and is working that issue. Stu spoke last year at the AILG annual dinner, creating a detailed profile of today's students. The AILG returned the favor by hosting a series of summer visits to various FSILGs. The Admissions staff was very appreciative of what they saw and learned.

Future of Alpha Tau Omega Building. A number of issues have yet to be resolved before the next use of the ATO residence at 405 Memorial Drive can be decided. The building is owned by the ATO Alumni Corporation, but the land belongs to MIT and the precise arrangement is encoded in a complex lease dating from the early 1970s. There ought to be some news on this front in the next installment of this message.

MIT 150th Anniversary. In 1861 William Barton Rogers' dream became a reality with the founding of Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. As an integral part of MIT's growth and success, the FSILG community will participate fully in the 150th Anniversary plans now taking shape. The celebrations will take place for 150 days next year, starting on January and concluding in June. A major event is scheduled for April 10th, the date when MIT was actually chartered, so keep that one on your calendar. The core planning team invites us to include any special celebrations historic milestone FSILG events on the 150th calendar. Speaking of history, please note that key dates in [FSILG chapter history](#) are maintained on the Alumni Association web site. More

detailed histories are of course kept by individual chapter, but if you notice an addition or correction, please let me know. My contact information is at the end of the message.

Planet MIT Launched. The Alumni Association is always searching for ways to connect MIT alumni with each other and the Institute. The latest innovation is a very cool web-based interactive map called [Planet MIT](#). Now we can find see the distribution of MIT clubs, alumni, students, and volunteers throughout the world. Also remember the on-line Alumni Directory is indexed by living group, making it very easy to find brothers and sisters you have not greeted in a while. To try these useful tools, go to the [Alumni Association web site](#). The map is under the "Networks" tab on the right-hand side, and the Directory is accessible on the left, after you have logged in.

Diversity: An Issue for Faculty and for MIT. The Institute has long prided itself on being an inclusive, socially conscious enterprise. By and large, the record is solid, but like any human organization, we often fall short of the ideal. In the 1990s for example, MIT owned up to an inadequate environment for many women faculty and took immediate steps toward improvement. This month, a [report](#) detailing the position of minority faculty was released. MIT again has significant areas to improve, and now has several specific recommendations to work on. Like MIT, our FSILGs have made significant, even pioneering, strides in attracting, accepting, and capitalizing on the diverse ethnic and racial mix of today's MIT students. My own chapter, which back in the 1960s fought our national on accepting Asian and Black students, today is a far more diverse chapter; and this diversity will better prepare our members to thrive in the internationalized working world of tomorrow. Other MIT chapters have likewise been in the forefront of inclusiveness, especially since MIT attracts talented young people from all over the globe. Several are learning to accommodate those with different sexual orientations. The FSILGs have proved effective in bringing together people of all kinds and learning tolerance and understanding. Let's take this opportunity to celebrate this, and to help advance this foundation which we all helped to build.

So thanks for all you do!

Alumni support has been critical in maintaining the vitality of this remarkable 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 contributing much needed funds to your chapter or the [IRDF](#).

And please stop by your living group to renew your ties - during your next Reunion or at some special chapter event. With this sustained, caring effort, we will indeed continue to have among the very best and most varied college residence communities in the nation.

Sincerely,

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NB: This message and all prior e-mails in this series can be found on the Aurora web site at this address:
<http://studentlife.mit.edu/content/aurora-reports-community>