

An Update from Bob Ferrara '67, Director of FSILG Alumni Relations

January 18, 2008

Hello FSILG alums,

This is another of a series of messages sent to you every six months regarding MIT's Fraternity, Sorority, and Independent Living Group (FSILG) community. From your comments to previous e-mails, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of us deeply appreciated our experience in our respective chapters while at MIT and want to see this continue to be available to current and future generations of MIT students.

The Situation Today

Thanks to your support and the intensive collaboration with many, there is a sense that our MIT community has definitely turned a corner in the past few years. Much remains to be done, and some of the chapters have been struggling with finances and membership. Contrary to expectations of a few years ago not a single chapter has ceased operations since the Freshman-on-Campus decision was implemented over five years ago. As good as this result is, the consequence has been an intense competition for new members.

In fact, the fraternities had the most successful rush since 2002, as 317 joined one of the 27 Fraternities during the recruitment ("rush") period before classes begin. Several of the five Independent Living Groups also did fairly well, though the recruitment practices are different. And the five Sororities also posted the highest ever new member total, 164 new women members. This result was especially gratifying since the sorority undergraduate governing council, known as the Panhellenic Association, had shifted the recruitment up to early fall this year, so almost all FSILG recruitment is concentrated at the same time - right after Freshman Orientation.

Here is a sampling of other newsworthy or interesting items in the past six months.

Dean Larry Benedict is moving on. Larry Benedict became MIT's first Dean of Student Life when he was hired by MIT in 2000 from Johns Hopkins University. During his tenure here, he really put Student Life on the map and brought professionalism to all aspects of operations. He is now ready to retire at the end of this academic year. So a [search committee](#) has been formed, led by Faculty Chair Steve Lerman '72 and with AILG President Steve Baker '84 as a member. Larry has been a true friend and supporter of the FSILG community, and we anticipate his successor will be also.

A major project of Larry's this past year has been the broad reorganization of Student Life, which I first reported in my previous message. We are now starting to see the fruits of that reorganization, as it becomes easier to develop new partnerships and find allies at MIT for FSILGs. For example, Director of Housing Dennis Collins was invited to become a member of the AILG Facilities Committee and is now providing vendor discounts, emergency planning tools, and a variety of other welcome offerings. Regarding other staff changes, last summer's job search for a new Assistant Director for Fraternities concluded very satisfactorily with the hiring of Marlena Martinez, a student affairs professional with experience in both Maryland and Florida. The FSILG Office staff is now at full strength. Marlena, Kaya Miller, Lauren Wojtkun, and Fran Miles are working regularly with all the FSILG chapters, along with Dean Donna Denoncourt and even me as requested. If you need to get in touch with any of these people, they can be reached via fsilg-office@mit.edu

Sorority extension. The Sororities have had remarkable success at MIT in the few decades since the first sorority, Alpha Phi, was asked to colonize on campus in the early 1980s. The current Alpha Phi international president, Laura Malley Schmitt '86, has strong MIT roots. She returned to campus this fall as the keynote speaker for a highly successfully Women's Professional Day. Later in the semester,

the Panhellenic Association, the overall governing body here on campus, recently voted to begin the process of adding another national sorority, or “extension” of the sorority community as it is formally called. In the months to come, several national sororities will be making their case to become the sixth MIT sorority. Initially, this new group will not have common housing, but will begin recruiting on campus next fall. The sororities have a different governance and organizational structure than fraternities and other independent living groups. And it has worked very well; the number of sorority-affiliated women has grown each year for two decades, to the point where the Panhellenic Association is the largest women’s organization on campus, with 537 members.

AILG recognized. The [Association of Independent Living Groups](#) (AILG) has been very effective at representing and advancing the interests of all of MIT’s FSILGs. At last September’s Alumni Leadership Conference, the AILG was awarded the highest organizational recognition, the Presidential Citation, for the work they have collaborated on or sponsored in recent years. Here is one example. This volunteer-run group helped found and now frequently looks to the FSILG Cooperative, Inc. (FCI) for carrying through day-to-day operations tasks. The FCI, which is owned by the individual chapters, has built solid business relationships with its member-owners, to the point where it is today the third largest such cooperative in the country. In yet another example of its win-win strategy, the AILG requested that MIT transfer the local insurance administration functions to the FCI. MIT did so and has been very pleased with the result. The premium collections that formerly took six months are now completed in one. All chapters now have insurance coverage automatically filed in the chapter’s FCI electronic “lockers”.

Celebrating a special tradition. An ad-hoc committee of alumni, undergrads, and MIT staff has begun laying the groundwork for a 50th Anniversary Celebration of first Smoot Painting. As Ollie Smoot ’62 will attest, neither he nor the others on the bridge that evening had the faintest clue that their measurement deeds that night would become the stuff of legend. Even Google Earth now can supply any distance on the globe calibrating in Smoots. In any event, on Saturday October 4, 2008, the icon of this treasured MIT tradition will be back on campus to celebrate a day of community service, civic recognition, and just plain fun. The day will be capped by a festive ‘50s party hosted by the MIT Museum. More details will be become available around Reunion time in June.

Two notable lights go out. On October 19, the pilot light in the stove at Delta Kappa Epsilon unexpectedly went out. This was the same stove where John Jackson had cooked for almost a half century. The house received a call a little later that day that John Jackson had just died. This dedicated man was so respected and loved a figure to the fraternity that he was inducted as a brother. He was indeed a worthy member of the “Greatest Generation”, a Navy veteran awarded the Purple Heart for wounds suffered in Pearl Harbor at the outset of World War II. The MIT community lost another stalwart contributor with the passing of Bob Greene ’55 of Phi Kappa Sigma. Bob was involved in many MIT activities, including long service as an Alumni Corporation member and as president of the Class of 1955. With his fraternity brother Bruce Wedlock ’57, Bob authored a key white paper that informed the work of the FSILG Task Force of 2004. His advocacy also led to an expansion of the role of the Independent Residence Development Fund (IRDF)

Major IRDF Ethernet network project underway. As you know, the [Independent Residence Development Fund](#) (IRDF) has been absolutely essential in maintaining the well-being of the FSILG community. After some legal research in the late ‘90s, Bob Greene ’55 and others pioneered the practice of Educational Grants to house corporations. These have proved enormously helpful and have set the stage for another IRDF effort, which is being planned by the AILG’s Information Technology Committee and MIT’s IS&T department. The FSILG Community Network Upgrade Project should afford every chapter the opportunity to obtain the latest wired and wireless network infrastructure. A high quality computer network is no longer a “nice to have” but an essential educational (and recruitment) prerequisite for MIT Students. Dave Latham ’61, Chair of the IRDF Board of Allocation, is a strong supporter, as are all who have looked at the results of the survey of an internal wiring conducted this fall. We plainly need to do this. The IRDF has approved funds for all initial planning and detailed survey work, which is commencing next month. The construction phase will, however, require the infusion of more donations and local participation. For the entire FSILG

community, the project cost will exceed six figures, so your IRDF contributions are especially appreciated now.

So please, if and when you make your annual donation to MIT, be sure to designate the “IRDF” as the recipient on the donor card or the on-line giving site. Perhaps more than other single fund at MIT, the IRDF has been funded by an enormous number of small to medium gifts, and they really add up! I’d also like to mention that Bob Greene’s fraternity brother Keith Kallberg and his wife, Razel, both MIT class of 1968, have broken new ground also. They persuaded MIT to have the IRDF be the beneficiary of annuity gifts, thus paving the way for others of us who are starting to think about estate planning.

Other distinguished support. Like us, the MIT Alumni Association also does it best support the FSILG community. Please remember Alumni Association CEO Beth Garvin HM was a member of the FSILG Task Force, and so helped to map out initiatives to strengthen our community. Beth drew on this knowledge when asked to be keynote speaker at the AILG Annual Dinner this past June 14. It is a familiar area for her, since she regularly reviews Alumni Association outreach efforts. For example, the [FSILG Toolkit](#) received a major overhaul this fall, including a new section devoted to the undergraduate FSILG members also. In response to alumni requests, there will be a dedicated time slot during upcoming Reunions for visiting living groups. And the prizes for the prestigious D. Reid Weedon '41 Award, which recognizes effective alumni relations programs, were substantially increased this year. Ever the active octogenarian, Reid also received a well-deserved accolade himself this year, as the “Distinguished Friend of Education Award” from the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. But even Reid has a ways to go to match MIT’s oldest alum, Yardley Chittick '22, who gave the opening address at the Beta Theta Pi Annual Conference, held here in Boston last November.

Thanks for your help

So thank you for your continued help, whether it is connecting with others alums, advocating for your chapter and the FSILG community, doing valuable volunteer work, or contributing much needed funds to your chapter or the IRDF. With this sustained effort, we can indeed continue to have the very best and most varied college residence communities in the nation, imbued with that great MIT spirit.

Thank you,

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NB: All prior e-mails in this series, plus other FSILG-related alumni communications, can be found on the Aurora web site at this address: <http://web.mit.edu/dsl/aurora/community-reports.htm>