



Dear fellow FSILG alumnus,

June 28, 2005

Last January I wrote to you about several new developments affecting MIT's FSILG community – the fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups that were so important to us during our time at the Institute. In that last message, you were promised an update in six months and this is it.

Much has happened. Many of the fraternities and independent living groups are adapting well, though several are struggling and in a fragile position. We still have 27 fraternities and five ILGs, though one signature fraternity suspended its current chapter and will begin a recolonization effort in the fall. The five MIT sororities, helped by today's demographics, have been getting stronger but are still seeking ways to connect their alumnae and to secure housing for the long term future. And the entire community must continue to evolve to meet changing student styles, societal pressures, local government requirements and parental expectations. There are challenges aplenty.

However, it is clear that the support and advocacy of alumni/ae like you have made a huge difference and are absolutely essential in ensuring the future of this vital FSILG community. For example, alumni requests were directly responsible for the creation of the FSILG Task Force in 2003. This group developed a broad blueprint for the continued success of the FSILGs. It is working and several key recommendations have already been implemented. (The full report is at <http://web.mit.edu/dsl/aurora>. Project Aurora is the formal name of the effort to ensure the future of the FSILGs).

We alums are also beginning to respond generously to the expanded role of Independent Residence Development Fund. This past year the IRDF, whose low interest loans served the FSILG community so well for decades, inaugurated a new Educational Operating Grant program. Many chapters are now receiving grants to help support operating expenses related to the educational areas of their buildings. For more details on how the program works -- and how you can help -- see <http://web.mit.edu/irdf/>.

MIT's leaders clearly heard how much you cared about this community and now appreciate better how the chapters can provide a healthy context for student living - one that encourages creativity, initiative, responsibility, and the leadership skills that enable many to go and change the larger world. As mentioned in January, support from the senior levels of the MIT Administration has very positive. Chancellor Phil Clay and Dean of Student Life Larry Benedict both invested time and major resources. MIT's new President Dr. Susan Hockfield has already shown that MIT community building is a very high priority. The President has personally been very supportive of the FSILGs and has already visited several chapters. Two weeks ago, she spoke at the Association of Independent Living Groups annual dinner, saying she is "very optimistic" that FSILGs will remain an essential and very effective feature of MIT's unfolding future.

A central theme of the FSILG Task Force report was that all the stakeholders -administration, alumni, and students - have a major role to play and all must work together to realize the full potential of MIT's unique range of FSILG living environments. I think this is happening. Permit me to first briefly touch on the recent contributions of the students and the administration, and then mention how alumni have helped.

- Most of us on campus believe the FSILG undergraduates today are responding well to the challenge of leading their organizations in today's more complex and demanding environment.
  - This year's fall recruiting drive was the most successful of the past 3 years and it is, now as it was then, an entirely student run operation.
  - MIT and the local authorities also continue to expect and rely upon effective student-run governance and discipline processes. This capability was tested – and responded well – in two incidents this academic year where student enthusiasm got the best of good sense.
  - The high energy of the undergraduates was also on display this spring at "Greek Week", a festival of games, chapter training, group discussions, and awards. Still these young people have found time for more FSILG-sponsored community and public service work than ever before.

- The Administration has stepped up its commitments to the FSILG community in several ways these past six months.
  - For the past 3 years, Financial Transition Plan funds have been extended to chapters to ease the freshman-on-campus housing transition, and this program has been extended another year.
  - MIT is also making a substantial investment by extending fiber optic connectivity to all the Boston and Brookline houses, where students need a fast and reliable network in their off-campus learning environment. MIT and Verizon, the regional telecommunications provider, have received all the necessary local permits and street installation work has begun, with a target completion date of late 2005.
  - A month ago, MIT's main giving web site was updated and now features FSILG needs much more prominently, as you can see at <http://giving.mit.edu/priorities/sll/fsilgs.html>.
- The Association of Independent Living Groups (AILG), which includes all the chapter alumni corporation members, and the MIT Alumni Association have been quite active as well.
  - The AILG holds well attended open sessions every quarter in the Student Center.
  - The AILG developed and sponsored very well attended training programs for FSILG Treasurers and House Managers during January break.
  - This spring a new web-based FSILG toolkit was published on the Alumni Association web site at <http://alum.mit.edu/ccg/living-groups/fsilg/>. This collection of resources and tools is especially useful to Alumni Corporation officers.
  - The Alumni Fund staff also just developed an FSILG fundraising guide, to assist chapters trying to raise money for capital improvements or renovations.

Quite beyond any monetary support, MIT has also increased its staff capability to work with chapters who ask for organizational support. As you may know, Dean Steve Immerman was recently given overall responsibility for implementing the recommendations of the FSILG Task Force. Many of you may remember Steve from his time in the 1980s and early 90s as Dean of Fraternities at MIT. He is thoroughly committed to the FSILG community. He has already made more MIT organizational resources available directly to chapters who request them, as the active alumni of AEPi, Fenway House, Theta Chi, Alpha Chi Omega, and others can attest. I am also happy to note that, following the lead of the MIT Lambda Chi chapter years before, the MIT Alumni Association conferred Honorary Membership on Steve for his many years of service MIT. Just three others were accorded the same honor during the June Reunion celebrations; one other honoree was longtime faculty member and Nobel laureate in Physics, Professor Jerome Friedman.

As these other FSILG stakeholders respond, we alumni also have opportunities to make our unique contributions. Here are a few of the possibilities:

- \* **Advocate.** Our alumni and alumnae continue to do this very well. In your communications with MIT and Alumni Association, please continue to remind people of the importance of the FSILG community and to share your ideas to preserve and strengthen it.
- \* **Show up.** Almost all the chapters now have an annual Alumni Weekend or Founders' Day. In addition, there a variety of campus-wide events at MIT that invite FSILG alumni participation, like the annual Alumni Leadership Conference this September. If getting back to Cambridge just is not possible, please come to discuss the FSILG situation with Dean Steve Immerman and me when we visit your region. We have been visiting several major markets around the country to meet with alums like you. So far there have been visits in New England, New York, Chicago, Denver, and now California in late June. Generally the MIT Club in the area publicizes and hosts the meeting.
- \* **Contribute.** Many of us FSILG alumni annually give directly as part of a chapter's annual fund drive and many chapters depend on this generosity. If the donor permits, such contributions are also now recognized in the Alumni Fund's Annual Report. Tax deductible and employer-matched donations can also be made by checking off the Independent Residence Development Fund (IRDF) when giving through MIT. The IRDF then makes funds available for loans and grants to the FSILG community. Some alumni prefer to donate to projects or activities that benefit the entire FSILG community rather than a particular chapter and there are a variety of alternatives available - like FSILG leadership training or scholarships. Whatever your choice, it is deeply appreciated.

\* **Volunteer.** Just about every FSILG House Corporation can use some assistance these days. A number are actively looking at forming Advisory Boards to provide additional – but more focused – roles where alumni/ae can work with the chapter. For many of these, Boston-area residence is essential, but MIT's Educational Counselors are based all over the world. In this role, you can help prospective MIT students understand the Institute and broad array of living options it affords.

The support and advocacy of alumni/ae like you have made a huge difference already and, further, you are absolutely essential in securing the future of the FSILG community. Thank you for your all the interest & advice and for your continued involvement & support. Collectively, our efforts can preserve and strengthen this FSILG community that has served us so well, even as we pass it on to the current and future generations of MIT students.

Thank you,

Bob Ferrara '67  
Director, FSILG Alumni Relations  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Email: rferrara@mit.edu