

Update from Bob Ferrara '67, Division of Student Life

June 24, 2010

Hello FSILG alums,

This is the June edition of the semiannual message regarding MIT's Fraternity, Sorority, and Independent Living Group (FSILG) community. Thanks to your support 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.

I. FSILG Community Highlights

A Year of Growth. The newest sorority, Pi Beta Phi, has increased its chapter size to more than 80 women. The Panhellenic Association, the umbrella organization of MIT's six sororities, now includes close to forty percent of female undergraduates, making it the largest women's organization on campus. On the men's side, two fraternity colonies were also recognized by the Interfraternity Council (IFC) this past year. Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE), long an important group on this campus, now has a small but very active colony. Pi Kappa Alpha, also successfully achieved colony recognition status. The Pikes, as they are also known, are no stranger to MIT either; in 1969 the national organization founded an MIT chapter here in the Cambridgeport neighborhood near MIT. Shortly thereafter the group admitted women members, causing a break with the national. Ever since, they have been known as "pika" (note the lower case). Like all the other Independent Living Groups here, pika has a very distinctive culture. The Pike representatives made sure to respect this history, and met with alumni and active pikans to ensure they had no objections to their former national starting another chapter here. Then they went to work and – after an intensive spring recruiting period, the new colony now includes over two dozen new members. Please remember these new recruits came on the heels of what was already the best overall fall rush since 2001. All three of these chapters bring new enthusiasm and their own flavor to MIT's FSILG stew. All are actively supported by alumni and have joined the alumni umbrella group, the [Association of Independent Living Groups](#) (AILG).

A New Future for 405 Memorial Drive. As reported in this message six months ago, the Interfraternity Council (IFC) withdrew recognition of Alpha Tau Omega fraternity after the chapter was found responsible for major violations of the IFC risk management policy. While this event was a major setback for ATO and our FSILG community, the IFC decision attests to the increased level of standards and accountability required of our FSILG community. The decision was a difficult one for everyone involved.

This past week the MIT Investment Management Company concluded negotiations with the Alpha Tau Omega Alumni Corporation to resolve ATO's monetary obligations to the Institute and MIT assumed control of the chapter house at 405 Memorial Drive. A significant number of building repairs remain; MIT Facilities will now begin supervising extensive work on the windows, heating system, roof and parapets, and this is expected to take several months. When the repairs are complete, the building will be transferred to the Division of Student Life (DSL). Occupancy by a new tenant is not expected until sometime in the fall of 2011, but in the next few months DSL will develop an application process for those organizations interested in the building.

Please remember that, though their active chapter is closed, the alumni of Alpha Tau Omega remain very much a part of the FSILG community. AILG chair Ernie Sabine (Student House '66) called on us "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". After its current suspension is over, the chapter alumni and its national can choose to organize a new colony, just as SAE and PKA have done.

Two Valued MIT staffers move on. This is bittersweet news as we say goodbye to two people who have been huge supporters of the FSILG community. Kaya Miller, Assistant Dean & Director of the FSILG Office, is leaving MIT for a senior officer position at Alpha Omicron Pi national sorority in Nashville, Tennessee. This is a natural career progression for a young and talented person. Kaya has been an integral part of this MIT FSILG community for eight years and ably led the [FSILG Office](#) for the last three. Alums, students, local officials, and MIT staffers alike have come to deeply respect her sound and principled approach to all she does. She has been recognized for numerous professional accomplishments, both at MIT as well as in the national arena, where was selected by the Northeast Greek Leadership Association as the Outstanding Greek Professional. Kaya and her colleagues in the FSILG Office have been central to the promotion of the values-based principles of the FSILGs, dedication to student self-governance, and the renewal of our historically strong relationships with the alumni and students of the FSILG community. She also leaves with the FSILG Office in a very strong position with outstanding and dedicated staff. Marlena Martinez, Assistant Director for Fraternities, has been appointed Interim Assistant Dean, while a formal search is just getting underway.

At the end of June, Karen Nilsson, Senior Associate Dean for Residential Life, will be retiring from MIT after a fruitful 25 year career. She served under three Presidents - Paul Gray, Charles Vest, and now Susan Hockfield – and has seen the campus expand into the old factory district around Albany and Pacific Streets. She helped lead the transformation of Santa Maria Hospital first to Green Hall, a residence for graduate women, and more recently to the home for Kappa Alpha Theta sorority. She notes that “MIT has been such a wonderful place to build my working career. I actually began as House Manager of Burton-Connor, worked in the Campus Activities Complex, next in the Department of Facilities (the old Physical Plant), then moved back to Housing. And now I will end my career in Residential Life”. She especially loved her association with the FSILGs these last four years. In fact, last year, Karen was inducted as alumna member of Pi Beta Phi sorority. A nationwide search for Karen’s successor was launched last month. AILG Chair Ernie Sabine ‘66 is a charter member of the search committee.

AILG Dinner & Elections. Both Kaya and Karen have been trusted and dedicated partners who have sought to make the Institute’s fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups the best they can possibly be. The AILG appropriately honored both of them with framed plaques at the [AILG Annual Dinner](#) this past June 9 in the MIT Faculty Club. This year’s keynote speaker was Dr. Carolyn Whittier, immediate past President of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors. Dr. Whittier brought a national perspective, noting the resurgence of Greek numbers nationwide, and a great local connection. Her beloved grandfather was an MIT alum, so she was surprised and moved by a special tribute, a framed composite of her grandfather’s 1927 Delta Tau Delta fraternity.

This dinner is fun and informative, but also has a business side as well. The [Annual Report](#) is presented, next year’s budget is voted upon, and elections are held. This year Ernie Sabine ‘66 (Student House) was re-elected to one of two open board positions, and new alumnus David Hutchings ‘10 (Zeta Beta Tau) to the other. Jim Bueche ‘62 (Chi Phi) is stepping down, but will continue his active AILG involvement as chair of the Insurance Committee; Jim has helped negotiate very favorable rates for several years now – in large part because of the sensible, co-operative risk management implemented at MIT. Three Ombudspersons were chosen by the AILG membership - Steve Stuntz ‘67 (Sigma Phi Epsilon), Alicia Allen Hunt ‘94 (Kappa Alpha Theta), and Tom Yu ‘96 (Fenway House). Thanks to all of these people for their additional service to the FSILG community.

Today’s Seniors Appreciate MIT Experience. MIT’s last [survey of graduating seniors](#) confirmed a positive trend of the last several years. Ninety percent of these new alumni reported that they really enjoyed their MIT experience! This result may surprise alumni of the generations that preceded this year’s class. The prevalent mythology of yesteryear was that MIT was a technical proving ground, not designed to be any more enjoyable than a Marine boot camp. That is changing. To compete for the very best students worldwide, as MIT now does, the Institute must - in addition to its top-ranked academics - also provide a first class environment that includes great options for dining, housing,

athletics, and student activities. The FSILGs enrich MIT's offerings in residential and leadership development options. By our direct involvement, financial assistance, and general alumni support, we can ensure these groups continue to play a vital role in MIT's future, as they did during our undergraduate years.

II. Alumni Achievements.

CARMA – Alums Helping in New Roles. As noted in previous editions of this message, there is more involved in running an FSILG today, than “back in the day”. This seems to be the case for basic maintenance of the structure but also for organizational and behavioral aspects of FSILG community life as well. And, even though alums hardly have the answers for all of today's circumstances, their simple presence seems to keep matters on a more even keel. So it is a healthy development that more alums – especially younger ones - are becoming involved as advisors, especially in an area as critical as risk management. The expectations of MIT, the local communities, municipal authorities, and even parents are higher than ever. The tolerance for poor behavior, especially in incidents involving alcohol, is minimal. Also, issues like mental health and decent nutrition are appropriately receiving more attention among the student population. In response, MIT has been working for several years on a program to provide special training and access for alumni willing to help chapters in addressing risk management issues in their chapter. This year the [Chapter Alumni Risk Management Advisor](#) (CARMA) program formally documented the CARMA role, even to the point of requesting periodic “homework” by its members. The program also sponsors two or more discussion sessions each term, to which the entire MIT community is invited. These tend to be particularly lively, especially when a large number of students are able to come, as was the case for last April's meeting. This year CARMA volunteers included 21 alums, an all-time high

AILG Sponsors Alumni Seminar, Revamps Courses. For the past five years, the AILG has been sponsoring a series of [alumni-run courses](#) offered during IAP (Independent Activities Period). These courses have been reasonably well received among the undergraduate population, to which they were primarily aimed, but participation was eroding as more and more activities crowded into this January period between MIT's two academic terms. So the AILG's Education Committee, headed by Bryan Owens Bryson '07, decided on a new, more ambitious approach going forward. First, the Education Committee wanted to do more to provide more assistance for [alumni volunteers](#). The IAP courses generally attracted a handful of alumni officers, since the times were just not convenient for working people. And alumni officers, unlike their undergraduates, generally handled a wider variety of topics. So a new [FSILG Alumni Volunteer Seminar](#) was designed and no less than a dozen alumni were invited to be instructors. The initial seminar was held this April 29, and from the evaluations and buzz afterward, the three dozen attendees clearly felt it hit the mark. The goal was to provide a summary of the many responsibilities and opportunities of today's Alumni House Corporations and Advisory Boards, touching every vital topic briefly and introducing the MIT people and resources to address every one of them. The session proved especially useful to alumni/ae new to their FSILG roles, but the old hands also noted that they learned new material as well. This one will definitely be repeated. Second, Education Committee is looking to slot its continuing traditional courses for undergraduates in better times during the normal academic year. For example House Manager 101 will be held in the early evening near the beginning of the term closer to work week. Likewise, Alumni Relations 101 will be held earlier in the fall term when alumni outreach is being planned. Some things will not change. The undergrads will have a steady ration of pizza during course offerings – and the instructors will be every bit as enthusiastic about their subjects.

FSILG Awards Cap a Good Year. As usual, there was a great and deserving crop of alums to honor at the annual [FSILG Awards Ceremony](#), which is held just before finals every May. Although the primary purpose is to recognize undergraduate chapters and leaders, this event has, quite naturally, evolved into a very meaningful ceremony that also recognizes alumni volunteers. In any year, you could pick dozens of deserving alums to represent the efforts of the 200+ volunteers who give their time (and usually more) to our FSILGs. This year, 14 alums were publicly honored. They hailed from every generation, from fraternities, sororities, and ILGs. All did yeoman work in the chapters and

several contributed greatly to community-wide efforts. And for the second year in a row, three exceptional people were honored with the new “Lifetime Achievement Award” for (really) senior alums. Bruce Wedlock '56 has given his 50 years of volunteer service to his beloved Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity. Bruce also co-authored the house manager's manual now used as a bible by many alumni for undergraduate house managers. His fraternity brother Bill Denhard '42, a former AILG Board member, has an even longer record of service, including decades leading the PKS House Corporation and as a class officer. The final recipient was Bill Noz '57, who has for many years been a mainstay of the (now resurgent and recolonizing) Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity.

More Reunion Week Living Group Receptions. For the past three years, the Alumni Association has been seeking to carve out a dedicated time slice of the packed Reunion/Commencement weekend schedule just for [Living Group Open Houses](#), so alumni returning for their Class Reunions can visit their MIT living group. In the first experiment back in June of 2008, ten FSILGs were in the initial trial, with heartening results. Last year, the total rose to twenty-five. The dormitories started to participate with the encouragement of the then new Dean for Student Life, Chris Colombo, who readily signed up Next House, where he lives as Housemaster. This past June, a record of thirty living groups participated, with the overwhelming majority of receptions occurring during the dedicated Friday afternoon time slot. Most are modest, informal get-togethers that allow a handful of alums to visit an important place in their MIT experience. A few, however, broke that mold, like Delta Upsilon. Their June reception again numbered over 50 people, as they use this opportunity to showcase their home at 526 Beacon Street for local alums as well. Alpha Phi sorority tried a reception for the first time this year, and found almost two dozen sisters visited their lovely townhouses on Commonwealth Avenue.

A Phoenix Arises. Perhaps the most exceptional of all the living group receptions was the event organized by alumni of an organization that has not existed for the last 25 years! Alumni from the mid-80s and earlier may remember the Non-Resident Student Association (NRSA), which was headquartered in a row house on Memorial Drive next to McCormick Hall. NRSA was the commuter “fraternity”, a thriving bunch known not only for their great intramural hockey teams but also for their excellent parties. Alumni from the 1950s and before knew this group as the 5:15 Club, from the departure time of an important train from North Station. When the group was first organized back in the early 1930s, almost a third of MIT students commuted from home.

Thanks to the determined efforts of past NRSA Presidents Allen Clark '63, Steve Corman '58, and Dave Williams '61, and others, a hugely successful reunion was organized this June. Somewhere over 40 NRSA alums attended, including the renowned Magliozzi brothers, Tom '58 and Ray '72, of “Car Talk” fame. Both grew up near MIT in East Cambridge. The assembled 5:15/NRSA alumni and spouses did quite a bit more than reminisce about former times and renew old friendships. Building on their successful reunion, they have created a [new web site](#) (still under construction), written the first organizational history, and even compiled a near complete list of all past Presidents of the group. Allen, his wife Claudia, Steve, and Dave did a lot of homework to find contact information, but if for some reason you or a friend were missed, please get in touch with me or, better, Allen at [allenvclark\(at\)alum.mit.edu](mailto:allenvclark(at)alum.mit.edu). Future NRSA reunions are definitely in the works.

III. MIT News

MIT Finances Stabilize. Like just about every organization on the planet, MIT experienced the economic shocks of late 2008 and 2009. MIT addressed the difficulties head on. After two years of unavoidable staff and expense reductions, the MIT administration reports that the worst is over and MIT's budget is firmly back into balance but at a lower "break even" point. This was the result of a lot of good work, especially the nearly 200-member [Institute-wide Planning Task Force](#), which "turned this difficult period into an opportunity to improve our operations" in the words of President Susan Hockfield. It is significant that during this period, support for FSILG was reduced in but one area – a 20% decrease in MIT reimbursement for Resident Advisors - and expanded significantly in areas funded by the [Independent Residence Development Fund](#) (IRDF). The IRDF Annual Educational Operating Grants are averaging over a third larger, because of expanded reimbursement for safety expenditures. Another IRDF-funded program converted all but three of forty FSILGs residences to a more reliable radio based fire alarm communication systems. The three which were not converted are right down the street from the Lafayette Square Fire Station on Massachusetts Avenue and thus have direct connections. For the rest, the change in communication links eliminated the need for the dual telephone lines and the associated expense.

MIT 150th Anniversary, Just Around the Corner. Plans for MIT's [150th Anniversary](#) plans are coalescing very well. There will be a variety of events that will take place during the first 150 days of next year, starting on January and concluding during next June's Reunion Weekend. The signature event will occur on Sunday April 10, the date when – back in 1861 just as the Civil War was beginning - William Barton Rogers received the charter for MIT from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MIT has rented the new Boston Convention Center and will be throwing a major party. It will be a grand day and if possible you and your family should be there. Complete details will be coming available in the next few months. Also please remember that key dates in FSILG history are maintained on an [FSILG history web site](#). If you notice an addition or correction, please let me know. My contact information is at the end of the message.

Alumni Association Thanks FSILG Donors. In a new effort inaugurated last year, the Alumni Association developed a new way to thank donors who gave directly to their FSILG. As any FSILG Alumni Treasurer can attest, this support is critical to maintaining a financially healthy chapter and thus supports MIT's overall mission. The initial recognition effort was quite a success; a large number of FSILGs chose to participate and 1,177 donors were recognized on a new [FSILG Donor Recognition web site](#). This result was no doubt by the fact that several chapters have capital campaign drives underway.

Please note the Alumni Corporation Treasurers forward only the names (and no amounts) of those who choose to be recognized, so the actual number of direct contributors is larger still. There are a few variations of direct giving. Hundreds of us make a donation to the chapter's alumni corporation, typically forgoing tax-deductibility. This is often in connection with Newsletter mailers each term, but many simply write a check. Many others now give to their FSILG's capital campaign via the Society for the Preservation of Greek Housing. For houses with historic significance, SPGH offers a particularly appropriate vehicle for charitable contributions. Also, if the donor is a member of the [William Barton Rogers Society](#) (annual givers to MIT above a certain threshold), there is another special recognition in the Society's Annual Report. Given the enthusiastic reception last year, the recognition will continue. So in a few months, after the close of MIT's fiscal year, there will be a second list of donors on the web site.

And thanks for all you do!

We can't do it without you! 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 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,

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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.

NB2: With its extraordinary concentration of intelligence, caring, and high aspirations, the Institute is still very much a place where dreams literally do come true. You will enjoy this [student-produced video](#). It reminds us of what a special place that MIT is. And that happy fellow dancing down the Infinite Corridor in the video and sliding down the banister below is a happy fraternity man.

