

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

June 26, 2009

Hello FSILG alums,

This is another semiannual message on developments in MIT's Fraternity, Sorority, and Independent Living Group (FSILG) community. Thanks to the active, sustained support of so many, current and future MIT students can enjoy the same intense shared educational and personal development experience that we did. Today's issues offer even more opportunities to be involved.

The Year in Review

A Good Year. This past academic year was a generally good one for MIT's FSILG community. There were several signs of growth. Our newest sorority, Pi Beta Phi, successfully established a chapter based in the dormitories on campus and now has begun a search for a chapter house. Likewise, the members of Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity have established a reconstituted chapter while living in the dorms and now are planning to move back into their historic home at 518 Beacon Street in Boston. They are also evolving their annex at 515 Beacon into a "residential learning and innovation community" that will focus on international development issues. Much of the first two floors is being converted for team use so that a new educational model can be tested in a fraternal living context. Another familiar fraternity is also seeking to re-establish itself on campus. Led by an active group of alumni, Sigma Alpha Epsilon has formally petitioned to establish a colony. 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. SAE was the last active FSILG to cease operations on what now is a largely FSILG-friendly MIT environment.

Advisory Boards Gain. One major way the alumni and MIT now seek to keep our undergrads on track is through Alumni Advisory Boards. Unlike the more familiar Alumni House Corporations, which serve as landlords, the Advisory Boards focus on the undergraduate chapter operations, often providing counsel to key undergraduate officers. All six sororities, SAE's new colony, and half of the remaining FSILGs already have or are in the process of founding an Alumni Advisory Board. In fact, all the national organizations now require them for new chapters. The student officers have welcomed them and appreciate this additional help in learning their jobs and their chapter's best traditions. For us alums, these Advisory Boards provide important volunteer opportunities, especially for those younger alumni in tune with current campus issues.

Some Setbacks. Although the overall picture is positive, some chapters are obviously struggling. A few have serious financial difficulties, exacerbated by today's economy, and two more suffered major disruptions caused by broken water pipes. The most serious of these was at Alpha Tau Omega, where the situation led to a license revocation by the Cambridge Licensing Commission. The extensive water damage has now been repaired and the chapter's license was reinstated earlier this month. MIT housing was forced to scramble to find housing for the brothers during the term. At Delta Kappa Epsilon next door, a January freeze burst a sprinkler and several other pipes, forcing the chapter out for most of the spring term.

Accreditation Process Working. While there are always issues of concern within the FSILG community, we see more public recognition and positive discussion, thanks in large part to the leadership of the [Association of Independent Living Groups](#) (AILG) and its alumni-run [Accreditation Process](#). This five year effort, based on an academic Visiting Committee model, has matured to the point where it is used, in difficult cases, to introduce needed interventions by MIT professional staff. This gives the entire process legitimacy and establishes good baseline data. So when the alumni peer review team returns a "Not Recommended" finding, as has been the case in three instances so far, MIT can go right to work. Two of these findings have already been satisfactorily resolved. Please note that Accreditation visits result much more frequently in a "Recommend Accreditation" status, with an acknowledgement of sound practices and some suggestions toward even better operations.

Economic Strains. There is one pervasive issue that affects almost all of us, and that is the economy. MIT and the FSILGs are adjusting to the harsher economic picture. MIT is undergoing a wave of staff reductions which will result in a 15% reduction of nonacademic budgets over the next three years. The Dean of Student Life – and MIT generally and via the [Independent Residence Development Fund](#) (IRDF) fund – are doing their level best to reduce the impact on this vital part of our community. The partnership of students, alumni, and the MIT administration has done so much over the past several years to restore the health of the FSILG community. Now this coalition must try even harder to continue addressing operations and needed infrastructural renewal. The good news is that a lot of alums are stepping

up to plate, and MIT has extended the possibilities where the IRDF can support our chapters. More on how each of these partners contributes follows.

MIT Students Are (More) Exceptional

Famed author and business commentator Jim Champy '63 delighted the largest-ever crowd of MIT alumni, students, and staff who attended this June's AILG Annual dinner. Jim is a devoted MIT alum and a longtime Phi Kappa Sigma House Corporation board member. He attributes much of his success to his FSILG experience. It provided real responsibilities and on-the-job leadership training, instilling lessons and life skills he has valued ever since. He is also a lifetime member of the MIT Corporation, where he noted that a common joke among the older alums is "I am glad MIT took me years ago because today I'd never be accepted." Indeed today's students are, by almost any measure, the most qualified in Institute history. And today the largest percentage in MIT history is now FSILG-affiliated, so clearly there is plenty of talent in the active ranks today.

Student Responsibility and Governance. Our students need to be well versed and versatile, since running an FSILG is more complicated today, than "back in the day." The expectations of their instructors, the municipal authorities, and now parents are higher than ever. And through it all, MIT still expects [high standards](#) from each individual, each FSILG, and an extraordinary degree of self-governance from the InterFraternity Council (IFC), the Panhellenic (Sorority) Association, and the Living Group Council. For example, the IFC has developed a very sophisticated risk management policy, designed to keep parties from getting out of control. Their policies and resulting sanctions do not - and probably can never - manage every situation in this age group. But they are sufficiently robust and fairly administered that the local licensing boards often defer to them and always seek their opinion. That is a real achievement.

Service Focus. Beyond the academic and FSILG organizational demands, today's MIT students are more active than ever in extracurriculars, especially when it comes to community service. Almost every FSILG supports a favorite local charity, some to an exceptional degree. For example, our Alpha Chi Omega chapter received the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center's 2008 Champions for Change Award for its events and fundraisers for domestic violence awareness. Many sisters volunteer in various capacities, and the chapter's 2008 Lip Synch event raised over \$5000, enough to fund medical advocacy support for 60 rape survivors in hospital emergency departments.

Awards for Many. So it is not surprising that there are many outstanding candidates for the annual [FSILG Awards Ceremony](#). This event is held in early May and has, quite naturally, evolved into a very meaningful ceremony that also recognizes alumni volunteers. This year, some 13 alums were publicly honored in front of a ballroomful of enthusiastic students. For the past several years, a similar number have been selected from more than two hundred-plus alumni who directly support their respective chapters and/or the many community-wide initiatives spawned by the AILG. The innovation this May was the "Lifetime Achievement Award" for (really) senior alums. The first 3 recipients have all served the FSILG community for more than a half century each. D. Reid Weedon '41 of Phi Beta Epsilon Fraternity is a senior MIT statesman and fundraiser. Al Bloom '50 and Bob Sandman '48 guided Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity for decades until stepping down this year.

Alumni More Inclusive

As we've seen with the rise of Alumni Advisory Boards, today's MIT students are more willing to work with older adults, and are much more comfortable in mixed generational working groups. The AILG, has begun capitalizing on this trend in several ways and involving student and even broader alumni participation in a host of [new committees](#). Sixty-two alums were involved in one or more of these committees, all of which have since produced a report or gained some new consensus. One is especially noteworthy; the AILG Finance Committee, chaired by Karl Buttner of Sigma Chi, tackled and successfully solved a long standing issue of comparing relative costs for FSILGs and MIT residence halls. With MIT Housing's help and some carefully tabulated survey results, the group was able to show clearly that FSILGs are priced competitively and, if anything, have room to raise prices. The MIT administration now actively seeks AILG involvement and input in policies that may affect the community. AILG and student members participated in two working groups, which just concluded their work. One group clarified the duties of the Resident Advisors in each FSILG. The other addressed issues around recruiting and supervising summer boarders, an important source revenue to some chapters.

Best Attended IAP Courses. Another mainstay of student-alumni interaction are the [AILG-designed courses](#) offered every January, during the Independent Activities Period. Originally these courses were intended to transmit knowledge to new undergraduate house officers like Treasurers and House Managers, but increasingly we are finding they serve alumni officers as well. In fact, this year one of two new courses, "Building Effective FSILG Alumni Advisory Boards" was introduced explicitly for alumni. The content was developed by AILG Board members Steve Baker '84 of Theta Xi and Sara Pierce '03 of Sigma Kappa. A second new course was even more ambitious. Designed by a recent grad and an undergrad President, this course addressed achieving leadership goals. It attracted nearly equal numbers of alums

and current students, so apparently Bryan Owens '07 of Zeta Beta Tau and John Cromwell '09 of Phi Delta Theta hit the mark. Even without these two new courses, attendance at the IAP courses was higher than ever, reaching over 100 people.

CARMA Program. Since 2004, MIT has been working with alumni to develop this program to provide special training for alumni willing to help chapters in addressing risk management. The [Chapter Alumni Risk Management Advisor](#) (CARMA) program really hit its stride this past year. The scope of the program was broadened to include wellness and related student health issues. Most importantly, students were invited to the general discussion sessions and that's when interest really took off. Over a dozen well trained alums are now involved in this effort. Once again, this role appeals to younger alums and they are specially equipped to help. This year's open meetings were especially lively and informative, often numbering over 30 highly engaged alums and students.

Shared Vision Retreat. At the request of the FSILG Office, the leaders of the AILG and the major student governing groups held a day long "Shared Vision" retreat at MIT's Endicott House this past February. This was tried with some success three years ago, but the most recent event was especially significant because it produced a tangible set of joint projects and also involved - for the first time - all three student groups – the IFC, the Panhellenic Association, and now the Living Group Council. The agenda and presentations are posted in the [Project Aurora archive](#).

AILG Annual Dinner – Best Ever. The comprehensive and thorough work of the AILG is evident when the Annual Report is presented at the June annual dinner. By the presence of so many MIT staff, students, and active alums, this event is visible evidence of the partnership that has arisen in support of MIT's FSILG community. The meeting was held in the main dining room of the MIT Faculty Club and over 80 people attended. As noted earlier, Jim Champy '63 was an inspiring and informative keynote speaker. As the annual dinner custom has developed, the evening is primarily social, but the AILG also gets some business done, like the presentation of the Annual Report, voting on the annual budget, and the election of new AILG board members. This year Stan Wulf '65 of Phi Delta Theta and Rich Possemato '01 of Nu Delta were elected to full three year terms on the Board. Alicia Allen Hunt '94 of Kappa Alpha Theta was elected as a new Ombudsperson, while Steve Stuntz '67 of Sigma Phi Epsilon was re-elected. Thanks to all of these people for their additional service to the FSILG community.

Noting Special Traditions

Smoot Plaque Dedication. Last October, during MIT's celebration of the [50th anniversary](#) of the Smoot marks on the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge, President Hockfield displayed a beautifully machined plaque specially made to mark the occasion. The plaque is now installed in its own (hopefully) hack-proof cement post on the bridge. Several of the original Lambda Chi Alpha brothers, who were with Ollie Smoot that historic night five decades ago, were present for the [June 4th plaque unveiling](#) at the beginning of Commencement Weekend. The ceremony included a blessing of the plaque by Institute Chaplain Bob Randolph and a round of thanks to those who made this a reality, like the MIT Hobby Shop and construction companies who donated their resources.

End of an Era. Delta Kappa Epsilon has a long, proud history on the MIT campus, including the inimitable weather balloon hack at the 1982 Harvard-Yale football game. Since the mid-1940s, generations of Dekes have been greeted and cared for by two legendary figures - the cook, John "Jack" Jackson, and "house father" Lew Gosmon. Two years ago Jack died and this month Lew followed him. At 89, Lew had been in good health and was still a regular at the house until this past January. Both of these men fought in World War II as part of the "Greatest Generation", Lew in the Army in Italy and Jack, a Pearl Harbor survivor, in the Navy. Both were also initiated as brothers. Over 60 Dekes spanning five decades traveled back to Cambridge for Lew's funeral, with over 30 attending a separate celebration of Lew's life the following evening at the Dekehouse. Scores of others sent photos toasting Lew and these are now posted online. Lew and Jack will live on in the hearts of those who knew them for a long, long time. May their memories be a continual blessing.

Delta Pi Remembers. Another unplanned but very meaningful fraternal gathering took place at MIT a few weeks ago. The Delta Pi fraternity was a relatively short-lived local fraternity here in the early 1990s, forming out of Alpha Epsilon Pi and, later in the 1990s, becoming a chapter of Sigma Nu. Though this genealogy may be complicated, their brotherhood is not; they remain an exceptionally close group. Thus it was especially painful when one of their cherished members, Cliff Stephens '96, died in a rain-induced auto accident in Tokyo. After the cremation ceremony in Japan, Keith MacKay '97 and Paul Deitel '91 organized a memorial service at the MIT Chapel. MIT Chaplain Bob Randolph presided over the Sunday June 13 service. It was attended by alumni from all over the country. In fact, somewhere close to half of those who called themselves Delta Pis came back to campus to remember Cliff, comfort his family and reconnect with each other.

Reunion Receptions. The FSILG community and the Alumni Association are making headway on a new tradition, making the living group reception a fixture during June Reunion Weekend. The Association's efforts included publicity

and dedicating a time slot - with no other major reunion programming – to permit alumni returning for their Class Reunions to visit their MIT living group. Ten FSILGs participated in last year's initial experiment. Please note this is an especially inconvenient time to visit, as students are moving in and out for the summer. Nonetheless, this year the [Living Group Open Houses](#) really arrived, with 25 groups taking part, mostly on Friday afternoon. The vast majority of these were FSILGs, but there were other two notable additions. The Non-Resident Student Association (NRSA) provided an on-campus gathering point on the MIT campus from the 1950s through the 1980s, a period when a significant fraction of MIT students were daily commuters. Their first-ever collection of NRSA alums met this past June and hope to continue the practice. The second notable addition is Next House residence hall, whose House Master is none other than our new Dean for Student Life, Chris Colombo. Chris is actively encouraging alumni engagements in all facets of MIT life. Thanks to his example, we will no doubt see even greater dormitory participation in the years to come.

MIT, IRDF, and Physical Renewal

Dean Chris Colombo. When he first arrived on campus late last summer, Dean for Student Life Chris Colombo had hoped to spend considerable time inviting even wider alumni participation and strengthening MIT's already impressive efforts in student leadership. As one with 34 years of student affairs experience, he appreciates how MIT's FSILGs have woven student leadership and alumni participation into their fabric. He wants to extend these successes to the wider MIT community. But the Dean's interests were abruptly pre-empted when MIT's budget situation became apparent. Many difficult choices had to be made – and quickly. He also had to rebuild an almost irreplaceable part of his new administration when a longtime, very experienced, and much beloved member of his senior staff died suddenly of cancer. The MIT "honeymoon" lasted but a few weeks.

A New Job. Dean Colombo has participated in FSILG events as much as a demanding schedule permitted. He has attended many AILG events, visited a dozen FSILGs, and is really getting to know our community. Apparently he likes what he has seen and wants to deepen the partnership. Two months ago he offered me a position as a part of his core administrative team, along with Peter Cummings, who has served as Financial and Human Relations officer during the difficult transition to the much leaner budget. Some of you in private industry may not consider a 15% reduction serious, but – as one who spent most of his professional career in a very cyclical defense industry – such adjustments are quite rare and unsettling in this academic culture. So now, in addition to working with the FSILG community that I've enjoyed so much these past years, there is an additional set of activities and parts of Student Life that must be learned – like getting data for upcoming University Accreditation and MIT Visiting Committees. This new position will afford even more opportunities to work on behalf of the FSILGs and the wider MIT community and help involve even more alumni in the mission of the Institute.

IRDF's Key Role. The [Independent Residence Development Fund](#) (IRDF) continues to assume even greater importance to our community, as more attention is focused on upgrades, renovations and much-needed deferred maintenance in the FSILG community's housing stock. All IRDF components saw increased activity in the past fiscal year. The low-interest Loan Program, the original IRDF program, issued six new loans as the physical renewal continues. The Annual Educational Operating Grant Program disbursed in excess of \$300K. All but four members of the community were recipients this year, and – with a newly approved, more expansive interpretation of qualifying safety expenditures, every FSILG with housing is expected to participate next fiscal year.

The major community-wide IRDF Grant Program this year was the Community Network Upgrade Project, a major network upgrade for all FSILG buildings. The work on all 40 FSILG-occupied buildings is going well and should be complete by this August. Every FSILG will have state-of-the-art wired and wireless networks, a must for today's connected students. The AILG's IT-Telecomm Committee, chaired by Ash Dyer '06 of Delta Tau Delta, is running the entire program, including the competitive bid process which got it rolling. A smaller-scale IRDF community program is the conversion to radio based fire alarm communication systems. A lengthy pilot program with five chapters with American Alarm Company confirmed the benefits of the changing communication links and eliminating the need for the dual telephone lines that are currently required. All the remaining FSILGs are now signing for a similar IRDF-funded upgrade.

As infrastructure renewal has picked up steam, the IRDF Project Grants have proved very popular in recent years. Several chapters made attractive and functional library renovations; because these qualify as strictly educational improvements, these are completely reimbursed. This success has a price. As generous as alum have been in contributing, however, the IRDF fund level has been falling. Consequently the IRDF Grant Advisory Committee worked with MIT tax attorneys to develop a new policy, which becomes effective this July. Details can be found [here](#). Future project grants will depend on how much is available and the giving history of the chapter. Based on the most recent IRS decisions, MIT's lawyers have also approved full reimbursement of several specific safety & municipal code compliance activities. This will result in larger Annual Educational Operating Grants this coming fiscal year.

Our entire community needs to encourage alumni giving to the IRDF even more in the years to come to sustain these programs and the physical renewal of our community. One great example in this regard is a well-known younger alum, Charles (Bob) Broderick '99 of Zeta Psi. Charles's company triples donors' gifts, and with this assistance managed a first-time contribution of six figures! Big gifts like these are always helpful, but the IRDF – more than any other fund at MIT – has been nurtured and sustained by many of us (over 2,000 in fact) giving what and when we can.

Thanking Donors. MIT has many ways to thank donors who give directly to the Institute. But as you know, a lot of the financial support for FSILGs does not come via the IRDF or MIT, yet this support is absolutely vital. Besides, many alums simply prefer to give directly to their chapter, forgoing tax-deductibility. So the Alumni Association staff sought a new, non-intrusive way to acknowledge such gifts, especially since many chapters are now starting major capital campaigns. Thanks especially to the advocacy of Bill Frezza '76, who headed Chi Phi's successful campaign, an easily administered procedure has been developed. Starting in July, each FSILG's Alumni Corporation Treasurer can report any donors who wish to be listed on a new Alumni Association web site. Early indications are that well over 200 alumni will be so recognized. Further, if the donor is a member of the [William Barton Rogers Society](#) (annual givers to MIT), there will also be a special recognition in the Society's Annual Report. This recognition applies as well for chapters who employ Stewart Howe to conduct annual giving campaigns and for those running capital campaigns, many of whom have elected to become members of the Society for the Preservation of Greek Housing. For houses with historic significance, SPGH offers a particularly appropriate vehicle for charitable contributions. Fortunately, a large number of MIT's FSILGs are in historic districts and thus qualify. In event, whatever the avenue donors give to an FSILG, they can – if they wish – be recognized by MIT.

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/aurora/archive>