



A message from Scott Marks '68, Alumni Association President

*Dear fellow FSILG alumnus,*

*The message that follows is the most recent six-month update on MIT's Fraternity, Sorority and Independent Living Group (FSILG) community by Bob Ferrara '67, Director of FSILG Alumni Relations. As the outgoing President of the MIT Alumni Association, I wanted to take this opportunity to again add a few comments to Bob's message.*

*Like all of you, I valued my independent living experience at MIT. In my case, these important formative years were spent at Phi Delta Theta. During my tenure on the Alumni Association Board, on the MIT Corporation, and around MIT generally, I have seen that support for and depth of commitment to this community continues to be widely shared. Many people acknowledge the FSILGs' special contribution to MIT's educational mission and to the development of skills and experience which lead to larger, lasting successes and friendships. The FSILGs foster personal growth in ways unlike other campus organizations; they were, are, and will be a vital and important part of the larger MIT community.*

*Alumni efforts and contributions have clearly succeeded in strengthening the FSILGs over the past two years, but we can do even better. As Bob notes in the message that follows, there are a growing number of opportunities to help. I personally would like to invite all of you to attend the next Alumni Leadership Conference at MIT on September 15-16, 2006. This gathering affords an unprecedented chance to meet similarly motivated alums and undergrads. For those who can't easily come back to campus next September, please continue to advocate, contribute, and/or volunteer as your circumstances permit. And please stay in touch with your brothers and sisters and ask them to do the same. I hope each of us can find at least one way to give back to this exceptional MIT FSILG community of which we are all a part.*

*Scott Marks '68  
MIT Alumni Association President*

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

Hello alums,

From these periodic updates, I hope you sense that MIT's FSILG community is getting stronger and adapting well to today's environment. Aided by demographics and a natural talent for organization, the sorority community has been thriving. A record number of 137 women joined one of MIT's five sororities during the recruiting period which ended in early February. This figure is up more than 30% from two years ago. Most of the twenty-six fraternities have also "turned the corner." In fact, the undergraduate InterFraternity Council (better known as the IFC) felt sufficiently positive about the situation that they voted this past April to support a recolonization effort by Sigma Phi Epsilon, a group with a long and distinguished history here at MIT. The five Independent Living Groups (ILGs) continue to add a special variety to campus life, as each brings a different mission and personality. The youngest of these, the Women's Independent Living Group, just held its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration.

### **How Progress Is Being Achieved**

Over the past two years, most of the recommendations of the FSILG Task Force have been accomplished. As you may be aware, this group of concerned alumni, students and administrators made several major recommendations to "ensure a long, vibrant future" for this community. (The full text of the report is available at <http://web.mit.edu/dsl/aurora>.) Now that basic needs are being met, the FSILG

stakeholders, which includes all of us, are increasingly able to focus energy on the educational aspects of the FSILGs. This is where our community can truly excel. From our own first-hand experience, we understand how our chapters, when functioning as they normally do, provide a living environment that encourages creativity, initiative, and responsibility among MIT students.

One recent stakeholder collaboration helped chart new directions to achieve this educational potential. A first-ever “Student-Alumni Summit” was convened on Saturday, February 25 at MIT’s Endicott House, an ideal location for a day-long retreat. Several dozen alumni and students used the day to articulate their shared purpose and to seek additional ways to make special contributions. The alums certainly found it an energizing, inspiring day. We discovered that today’s MIT students interact easily with older adults and are quite willing to articulate an agenda for their FSILG community. For example, several of the students sought to expand and refocus the Faculty Advisor program. Thanks to their persistence, Professor Paul Lagace ‘78 of Course 16 has convened a group to accomplish this. This fall we expect to see more than double the number of faculty and MIT staff directly involved with FSILGs.

One of the sponsors of the February gathering is the [Association of Independent Living Groups](#). The AILG, an umbrella group of all 39 active alumni house corporations, has been an essential player in developing programs for the FSILG community. These past few months saw the completion of major milestones on several key initiatives. The alumni-run Safety, Licensing, and Inspection program has just successfully completed its first full cycle. Municipal regulation today is much more involved and detailed than at any time in the past. The new Building Safety Facilitator, Jay Flynn, has developed good working relationships with each of the chapters and the several municipal authorities who have jurisdiction in this area. The thorough preparatory work by all resulted in a much smoother process than in any recent year, and all our houses now have current lodging licenses. Safety of the undergrads is, of course, a paramount concern to all. Bruce Wedlock ’56 of Phi Kappa Sigma, a founder of the American Alarm Company, has special expertise here to draw upon. Bruce’s contributions as editor of the online “FSILG House Manager’s Manual” were recognized by students this spring, as he was one of eight alums honored at “Greek Week” awards this May.

Bruce was hardly alone; FSILG student and alumni received an unusually large number of MIT and national awards this past season. Here are some examples. MIT’s Panhellenic Association won a special “Leadership and Educational Programming Excellence” award; “Panhel” put together an array of professional and public service events, including a “Women’s Week,” in which President Susan Hockfield was the keynote speaker. Sigma Kappa sorority earned the coveted D. Reid Weedon ’41 Award for Alumni Relations this year--the first time an undergraduate sorority chapter has done so since the award was created two decades ago. Reid, a beloved member of Phi Beta Epsilon and still an active member of the MIT community, endowed this highly competitive award which recognizes the FSILG that has demonstrated the greatest effort in alumni relations the current academic year. Delta Psi (No. 6 Club) was also named for special merit because of the fraternity’s effort in reaching out to their heavily international group of MIT alums. Finally, the Alumni Honor Roll of Service Award presented to Steve Pettinato ’80 this spring was especially noteworthy. Though based in Chicago, between occasional Boston visits and today’s electronic technology, Steve has been a “hands-on” leader of the Lambda Chi Alpha house corporation. Steve’s efforts and ability to inspire undergrads resulted in the strongest pledge LCA class in years both in quantity and quality.

The Accreditation Process is another important AILG alumni-run initiative. This peer review process, sanctioned by the Dean for Student Life, is proving very effective for chapter self-assessment and for sharing knowledge to improve operations. This is another activity in which students and alumni learn directly from each other about maintaining the chapter--organizationally, physically, and financially. The students benefit from alumni experiences, and alums, in turn, come to understand today’s student challenges far better. This month saw the completion of a final round of accreditation reviews in preparation for extension to the entire community in the next academic year. All told, nine chapters have undergone accreditation reviews so far.

Dan Geer '72 and Dave Burmaster '69 have just completed their terms on the AILG Board; both made enormous contributions to the FSILG community during their tenure. Dave was the force behind the establishment of Treasurer 101 Course, which has now been offered to enthusiastic undergrads for 3 successive years. It has also served as a model for several related educational ventures. Dan was the architect of the FSILG Cooperative, Inc. This purchasing and service coop has grossed over \$2 million in sales in a few short years and enabled substantial cost savings for its owners, the MIT FSILG chapters. Chris Rezek '99, the Cooperative's first and extremely able Executive Director, is going back to school for an advanced degree next fall, but his successor is already on board. AILG chair Susan Woodmansee '97 thanked all of them for their great service at the AILG annual dinner on June 14.

MIT is also delivering on key commitments to our community. All FSILGs now enjoy high speed fiber optic connections, thanks to a major project by the Information Services & Technology department. The Facilities department extended the interactive MIT Campus Map to Boston and Brookline so it can be used to locate all forty-one FSILG houses. The Medical department hired Chad Waxman, a health and wellness expert with a fraternity background, to work directly with all the FSILGs on issues of common interest. To ensure all this good work stays on course, a ten member "Aurora Advisory Committee" was recruited from among senior FSILG alums and regularly reviews progress with Senior Associate Dean Steve Immerman, who has overall responsibility for MIT's FSILG support.

The Alumni Association also seeks to make more of its tools and resources available to FSILGs. Several chapters are now taking advantage of the Alumni Site Builder, a tool designed for MIT-affiliated groups to easily develop a Web presence. One good example is the Web site created by Phi Sigma Kappa at <http://alumweb.mit.edu/ilgs/phisigmakappa>. Several other chapters have begun to use SmarTrans for on-line event registrations, such as Founders' Days and credit card payments for their reunions. This Web-based tool is now also available for chapter fundraising. Most of all, though, the Alumni Association provides opportunities to meet and network with other alums. There is nothing like face-to-face communication to get to the core issues that concern people. MIT Clubs throughout the US have now sponsored over a dozen visits by Dean Steve Immerman and me to discuss FSILG issues. Earlier in June a new Reunion experiment was tried, an FSILG Reception on Saturday afternoon. It proved a hit; over fifty interested alums dropped by this casual event, which no doubt will be repeated next year.

## **What's Next**

President Susan Hockfield and Dean of Student Life Larry Benedict have taken action on a key FSILG Task Force recommendation, the inclusion of FSILGs in long-term campus housing plans. Specifically, the president has directed that a detailed study be prepared for those chapters who have indicated active interest to move on or near the campus. At least six groups have done so to date. The project manager from the Department of Facilities is Julia Nugent '86. As an undergrad Julia lived at Student House on Bay State Road. Thus, she brings to this role her knowledge of independent living group needs, as well as her extensive experience in housing planning and design. As this work unfolds, alumni and undergraduate leadership will be integrally involved.

The last large-scale move by any FSILGs occurred back in the early 1970s, when Alpha Tau Omega and Kappa Sigma moved from Boston to MIT-owned land on Memorial Drive. Since then, six other FSILGs have found space in MIT buildings and/or on MIT land. Especially given the plans in the paragraph above, several alumni--led by Lisa Tatterson '99 of Alpha Chi Omega--requested a review of the lease arrangements for these eight chapters. In response, a focus group was convened and has forwarded a dozen specific recommendations, which are now being reviewed in detail by MIT's attorneys. We are especially encouraged that MIT's new Executive Vice President, Sherwin Greenblatt, has taken an active interest in FSILG issues.

## How You Can Help

Sustained alumni involvement was key to revitalizing the FSILG community, just as it will be in moving us to the next level. You all know how to help, but here are some reminders:

**Connect.** Please stay connected with your own chapter's alumni and actives. Pretty much every chapter has a newsletter that you should be receiving. If not, the new directory on the Alumni Association Web site--<http://alum.mit.edu/index.html>--makes it easy to correct your contact information and to look up your brothers and sisters. Perhaps you can attend an Alumni Weekend, Founders' Day, or one of the MIT-based events that brings people together, like Reunions or the annual Alumni Leadership Conference.

**Advocate.** Let people, inside MIT and out, know you value the FSILG community. Hold the MIT administration, the AILG, and even more your house corporations and active undergraduate members accountable for providing excellent living and learning environments.

**Contribute.** FSILG alumni annually give directly as part of a chapter's annual fund drive and many chapters depend on this generosity. At least five chapters are actively investigating major renovations and they will each require alumni generosity to succeed. In addition, when you give to MIT, consider designating your gift to the [Independent Residence Development Fund](#) (IRDF). This past fiscal year, the IRDF provided several hundred thousand dollars in each of its three programs--loans, constructions grants, and annual operating grants. This past year several alumni also made significant gifts to fund related student life priorities--like FSILG leadership training. All your participation and gifts are very much appreciated.

**Volunteer.** As the FSILG community evolves to meet today's challenges and opportunities, the variety of volunteer roles continue to broaden. Just about every FSILG House Corporation and Advisory Board would like more expert help these days, and not just from local alums. To address this need, the AILG and the Dean's Office are sponsoring a series of workshops as part of this fall's [Alumni Leadership Conference](#) at MIT. The afternoon of Friday, September 15 is devoted to sessions ranging from financial basics and fundraising to chapter advising. Fellow alums, augmented by student leaders and MIT administrators, will share what they know. This is designed to be a "single stop" to begin--or rejuvenate--an FSILG volunteer commitment. If you would like to participate, please let me know and I will send registration details when they become available later this summer. The Conference also provide a chance to meet engaged alums from all over as well as understand the "big picture" issues that MIT is seeking to address. It is guaranteed to be fun and stimulating.

The Institute should have one of the very best college residence communities in the nation. We have what it takes: an existing system with many strengths and talented people from across the community committed to making this work--and the irrepressible spirit of invention that defines MIT, and that spawned the distinctive FSILG system in the first place. We can all help to see this promise is realized.

Thank you,

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