

Update from Bob Ferrara '67, Division of Student Life

March 7, 2011

Hello FSILG alums,

This is another edition of the semiannual message for MIT's Fraternity, Sorority, and Independent Living Group (FSILG) community. It was delayed several weeks so I could incorporate the news about the Phi Beta Epsilon settlement noted in the second item below. Thanks to your support, our FSILGS can continue to provide current and future generations of MIT students with the intense shared educational and personal development experience that we enjoyed.

I. FSILG Community Highlights

Recruitment Numbers Up Again. The fall of 2009 was an excellent year for recruitment, but this past fall was even better. Even though two fraternities did not participate, more underclassmen were involved, with 310 freshmen men accepting fraternity bids. A total of 477 bids were extended to 373 individuals, compared to 437 bids to 338 men the year before. The sororities have a different, very structured process. They also saw the number of bids increase slightly to 196 women, up from 192 bids the year before. The newest chapter, Pi Beta Phi, completed its first full-strength year, so the six sororities did not see a quantum jump as was experienced the year before. The six Independent Living Groups, which tend to have a more extended rush, do not submit their results in the aggregate, but reports indicate they have done quite well also.

These results are all the more impressive given how competitive the situation is on campus today. The dormitories have continued to upgrade their facilities and programming, and also offer excellent living arrangements.

Phi Beta Epsilon and MIT Resolve Issues Relating to IFC Sanction. Last Friday, Phi Beta Epsilon and MIT issued a joint statement announcing the resolution of issues raised by PBE in connection with last fall's suspension of the fraternity. You can read the statement [here](#). All of us in the FSILG community should look forward to restoring and reinvigorating the deep ties which bind PBE to the Institute.

FSILG Office Back to Full Strength. After an extensive nationwide search, Marlana Martinez Love was selected this past September as MIT's Assistant Dean & Director of the FSILG Office. The Search Committee included alumni, students, and administrators; they quickly learned that MIT's excellent national reputation in student affairs means we can attract some of the best talent available. Applications were received from over a dozen states. After many interviews and a typically deliberative process, the group unanimously recommended Marlana. Her background includes national professional organization involvement, and she was a founding member of a sorority chapter during her college years. She has a solid academic background and experience with our MIT community, where she served for three years as Coordinator for fraternities. Marlana has been an integral part of the FSILG Office's promotion of the values-based principles for our FSILGs, as well as the renewal of our historically strong relationships with the alumni of the FSILG community. On January 31st, she organized the third annual "Shared Vision" retreat, which brings together FSILG stakeholders from MIT staff, alumni leaders, and the officers of the major student governing groups. These gatherings foster a much better awareness and understanding of each group's interests and goals and make our working together more effective.

Marlana's promotion required that another search be conducted to fill her previous position. Although many positions were frozen in the aftermath of the financial crisis, the Dean for Student Life sought to fill this opening in recognition of how vital the FSILG office is to student life at MIT. This second

search committee converged on one candidate, Catherine Sohor, who started earlier this month. Catherine comes to MIT with extensive advising experience from nearby Babson College and William Paterson University in New Jersey. Cat, as she is called, brings lots of energy and relevant experience to her role: she is a member volunteer with the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA), the Northeast Greek Leadership Association (NGLA) Conference, and a number of national fraternal organizations including Beta Theta Pi.

Another important new face is Henry Humphreys, MIT's Senior Associate Dean for Residential Life & Dining. Henry takes over for a great friend of the FSILG community, Karen Nilsson, who retired last June after a 25-year MIT career. Henry comes most recently from Boston College and has deep interest in "living and learning" communities, the subject of his Doctoral thesis. He is eager to learn more about ours and would love to visit all of our FSILGs in this coming year. Alumni Corporations are encouraged to get to know Henry and Cat, and extend a dinner invitation when convenient.

II. Alumni Achievements.

AILG Focusing on Infrastructure Renewal. With the help of the [Association of Independent Living Groups](#), our FSILG Community is starting to address years of underinvestment in the 41 buildings that now provide close to 1,000 beds to MIT undergraduates. We have been fortunate that the majority of these are durable structures, built around the turn of the last century in Boston's Back Bay or along Memorial Drive in Cambridge. The AILG Board, along with its Facilities and Finance Committees is developing various tools and making expertise available for those chapters interesting in tackling building renewal projects. For example, the AILG Finance Committee has developed a financial modeling tool and now has several resident experts who have been through the entire process. The MIT Annual Fund will also make available an FSILG Fundraising Toolkit and has assisted several Alumni Corporations starting down this path. This is good time to renovate; the cost of capital, especially from the IRDF, is low and contractor costs are very reasonable. But, as always, the key ingredient is the human one. Does your chapter have the alumni volunteer willingness, staying power, and capability? If the answer is "Yes," the help is there! We can report that several chapters have answered in the affirmative already; three successful renovations were completed this year. Chi Phi's historic and elegant chapter house at Hereford and Commonwealth Avenues looks as good as ever. The Back Bay townhouses of Alpha Phi Sorority and Theta Chi' Fraternity completed their most extensive updates in decades, too. Congratulations to these chapters.

IRDF Balances Books. For the past several years, the [Independent Residence Development Fund](#) (IRDF) has been a key element in establishing financial equilibrium as the FSILG community adjusted to new demographics and the freshman-on-campus situation. Since 2005, the half-dozen alumni involved in oversight of IRDF operations encouraged MIT to have outflows to the FSILGs exceed the fund's inflows, much of which comes from generous alums like you. MIT, which has the final authority on dispensing IRDF funds, accepted that advice. MIT also supported the IRDF's major community-wide grants to all FSILGs for items like the alumni-run Safety, Licensing, and Inspection (SLI) program, conversions to a modern fire radio system, new carbon monoxide detectors as mandated by a recent Massachusetts law, and the installation of the latest wired and wireless communications networks in all FSILG buildings.

With these system-wide objectives successfully completed, the focus is now on ensuring that the IRDF has sufficient capital for our community's future and to support the much-needed modernization and deferred maintenance issues noted above. Thanks to the [new procedure](#) in effect for IRDF Project Grants—the popular Annual Educational Operating Grants and Construction Loan programs are not affected—the IRDF balance sheet is very solid. This past November seven chapters applied for Project Grants in the current fiscal year; all but one were approved in the full amount. Future years' project grant awards will depend on how much is available and the giving history of the chapter alumni. So to support your own FSILG's future and sustain the entire community, please [give to the IRDF](#).

Best Alumni Newsletter? One of special pleasures of my role at MIT is that I am routinely copied on almost all of the print newsletters that the FSILGs regularly produce to keep their alums informed. Most are very well done and much appreciated by their audience. But this year Phi Sigma Kappa Fraternity decided to go all out for their Fall 2010 Alumni Newsletter. Frankly it was just about the best one of its kind I've ever seen. Phi Sig Alumni Corporation Secretary Joe McMahon '85 and his board have generously offered to share it as inspiration to others. On the PSK web site, the newsletter has two sections, [Alumni](#) and [Undergraduate](#). Please especially note the innovations in the Alumni section, which includes a variety of Alumni Association data, such as lists of all the fraternity's MIT volunteers, missing alums, and IRDF donors, plus a customized Alumni Map adapted from the new "Planet MIT."

Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority Thrives. This MIT chapter was feted many times at its National Convention. Kappa Alpha Theta is among the nation's oldest and largest sororities, currently numbering 170 chapters, so there is a lot of competition for their major awards. Our local group won the very top honors for both Membership Development and Facility Management. This latter award, accepted by Mary Linton Peters '92, is the result of the chapter's outstanding care of their Green Hall home at 390 Memorial Drive. MIT's Panhellenic organization, the governing group for MIT's six campus sororities, was also, recognized for its competent role in supporting overall membership and recruitment.

Chi Phi Honors Denman McNear '48. Chi Phi's National Fraternity's highest individual award, the Walter Leland Cronkite, Jr. Congressional Award, is named after the famed TV anchor. It is reserved for "alumni who have made a profound impact on humanity while exemplifying the highest ideals of the Fraternity". McNear has had a major career in the railroad industry, all the while being an active MIT and Chi Phi citizen. In accepting the award, he said, "Being in a fraternity, you develop greater relationships, appreciation, accountability and responsibility. In a fraternity you have a brotherhood environment that develops us to our highest potential. Just think how your career is dependent and fashioned on those few years maturing in the fraternity."

Theta Xi 125th Anniversary. This past April marked the 125th anniversary of one of MIT's first fraternities, the Delta Chapter of Theta Xi. This milestone was celebrated by a full weekend of activities, including a Saturday night dinner at the MIT Faculty Club. One of this chapter's outstanding alumni is Steve Baker '84, who has served not only as Theta Xi National President but also as a highly regarded chair of MIT's AILG organization for several years. Please remember that key dates in FSILG history are maintained on this [FSILG history web site](#). If you notice an addition or correction, please let me know. My contact information is at the end of this message.

Astronaut Bill Lenoir Takes Last Flight. The MIT community, especially his Sigma Alpha Epsilon brothers, was deeply saddened by the unexpected passing of Bill Lenoir '61 in a bicycle accident. As this [MIT News article](#) notes, Bill was an extraordinary MIT citizen and a key player in SAE's recolonization on campus. As one of his SAE brothers noted, "Bill was the first, and most likely the only, person to eat jalapeno peppers in space. According to what he told me, a fellow astronaut—knowing he liked jalapenos—slipped one or more to him as he was boarding the space shuttle." The rest is space history. Bill will be missed by all.

III. MIT News

Undergraduate Class Size Increases. A substantial donation by grad alum Fariborz Maseeh ScD '90 will allow MIT to finish renovation next August of the "old Ashdown" House at the corner of Mass. Ave. and Memorial Drive and thus permit expansion of the undergraduate population to 4,500 students. The housing projections continue to rely heavily on FSILG residences; the addition of a new dormitory enables not only an overall class size increase but will provide much needed flexibility and dramatically reduce overflow in the dormitories.

There is a wonderful story behind this gift. Maseeh, an Iranian immigrant, came to the US for his education, first at Portland State as an undergraduate, then to MIT to pursue a doctorate in Civil Engineering. After founding a very successful software company, he was looking to give back to this country which had been so welcoming to him. He is especially concerned with maintaining American competitiveness and felt helping more young people receive an MIT education was the best way he could help. His gift does precisely that, as “his donation as an investment in the future of MIT and the nation at large”.

MIT 150th Anniversary Celebration Begins. MIT's [150th Anniversary](#) formally opened this January with the unveiling of a new gallery at the MIT Museum devoted to documenting the Institute's remarkable history of invention and innovation. There are many ways to participate before the formal conclusion on next June's Reunion Weekend. All of us are invited to the [The Next Century Convocation](#) in Boston on Sunday April 10; this is the capstone of the 150 days of celebration.

Then on Saturday, April 30, several FSILGs plan to hold events in concert with MIT Open House, when much of the campus will be holding exhibitions and performances for an anticipated thousands of visitors. As part of this day, the [Association of Independent Living Groups](#) (AILG) is organizing a display of FSILG achievements right in Lobby 10. Thanks especially to the energy of Dave Burmaster '69, the AILG is supporting a number of related 150th projects, including an alumni-undergrad Community Service Project during Greek Week and assembly of an archive of historically important documents to our community. If you have a special interest in recording or preserving FSILG history, please let me know and I'll be happy to put you in touch with Dave.

Dining Plan Moves Forward. Almost all the FSILGs have had dining plans in place for years. Typically meals are included in the house bill. Not so for the dormitories, which for the past two decades have gotten by with a patchwork of options and subsidies. No longer. The budget crisis catalyzed action, forcing the Institute to address the large deficits of the current system. Many current students were not happy with any proposed change, and quite a few organized for keeping the status quo or something like it. Despite any number of forums, white papers, and administration proposals, this issue became quite a contentious one this past semester. Nonetheless, the following plan is being adopted next fall. Undergraduate residents of one of the five dormitories with dining halls (Baker, McCormick, Next, and Simmons, and the new Maseeh Hall) will be required to enroll in the meal plan. Students who live in other dorms or in an FSILG may also enroll on a voluntary basis if they wish and can eat at any one of the dining halls. The new meal plan includes many new features that students and parents have asked for in the MIT dining system, such as 7-day per week operation, all-you-care-to-eat service, and later hours to accommodate athletes and other students.

What Happened to IHTFP? Just as the FSILGs must continue to evolve to attract freshman to their organizations, MIT must continue to improve its offerings to attract the very best students in the world. As the Educational Councilors among you know, the top high school seniors we interview today are often choosing between one the Ivies, a Duke or Stanford, or any of the increasing number of outstanding overseas universities. To gain valuable feedback, MIT now regularly surveys its graduating seniors. This past year found that ninety percent of the graduating seniors were satisfied with their MIT experience, an all-time high. More details are available from this [MIT News article](#).

FSILG *Direct* Donors Recognized. Many of us choose to give directly to our FSILGs, typically forgoing the tax deduction. This is an important source for maintaining the financial health of the community. Last year the MIT Alumni Association initiated a voluntary recognition program for this group of donors, whose contributions are made not via MIT, but through the Society for the Preservation of Greek Housing, or most often just directly to the FSILG's Alumni Corporation. For the fiscal year which closed this past July, seventeen FSILGs participated, up by one from last year's initial trial. The number of recognized donors also increased to 1223 alumni, and all of these are listed on the Alumni Association's [donor recognition web site](#). More than 200 of these generous people are also members of MIT's William Barton Rogers Society, so they receive additional recognition in the Society's Annual Report.

And thanks for all you do!

Alumni are absolutely essential to the continued health and vitality of MIT's special 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 Division of Student Life web site.

