



A message from Scott Marks '68, Alumni Association President

Dear fellow FSILG alumnus,

The message that follows is another periodic update on the health of the MIT Fraternity, Sorority and Independent Living Group (FSILG) community by Bob Ferrara, MIT's Director of FSILG Alumni Relations. Prior to his message, however, I wanted to add few thoughts of my own. I am currently serving as the President of the MIT Alumni Association.

As I first experienced years ago in joining Phi Delta Theta and continue to see much more vividly in my volunteer role today, the FSILGs are an absolutely vital and important part of the larger MIT community. Quite beyond the development of the deep social bonds we all share, they continue to play a special role in educating students to become more complete and capable citizens and leaders. So, permit me to send along my best wishes and further encourage your interest and involvement. I especially want to thank all of you who have risen to the challenges of recent years and come to the aid of this exceptional community. As Bob notes in the message that follows, the alumni have accomplished much and there is more yet to come. To ensure this legacy exists for current and future generations of MIT students, we need to stay informed, advocate for the FSILG community, contribute as our means permit, and volunteer when possible. Please stay in touch with your brothers and sisters and ask them to do the same. In addition, your participation whether as a volunteer for your FSILG or as a donor to fund such initiatives as the Independent Residence Development Fund matters. I hope you will find ways to give back to the FSILG community that means so much to so many.

*Scott Marks '68
MIT Alumni Association President*

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

Hello alums,

Since my first message a year ago shortly after assuming this role, it is clear that a lot has been accomplished by the FSILG community by the students, by MIT, and by alumni/ae like you. Overall, there is more stability in the FSILG community, with fewer chapters at risk. And there have been several positive developments extending the central mission of our chapters in providing exceptional living and learning environments for MIT students.

The numbers

The numbers are gradually improving. We still have 36 active chapters, plus 3 additional active alumni corporations. This past fall, more than 88 percent of all incoming male freshmen were involved in the rush period and just over 50% of them chose to affiliate with a fraternity or ILG. This is an all-time percentage high a testament to the hard work and energy of today's undergraduates. After a period of experimentation, the fall rush period now begins on the weekend before the start of classes, allowing the fraternities and ILGs to focus more energy on recruitment. This is important since several chapters are below target occupancy. The MIT sororities continue to grow and thrive. With 430 members, the Panhellenic Council forms MIT's largest women's organization. Currently, the sororities begin their recruitment drive at the close of January's Independent Activities Period. In the fall of 2007, however, the sororities plan to move this activity to orientation, so we will again have a single recruitment period for the entire FSILG community.

Stakeholder accomplishments

There is no question that recent times have seen very contentious arguments about the prospects for FSILGs here at MIT and that the future of each and every chapter is still not guaranteed. But especially in the past year, because of the commitment by we alumni/ae and many at MIT, I believe there is growing confidence that the larger FSILG community will continue to be an important, vital aspect of MIT life. At the annual dinner of the Association of Independent Living Groups (the AILG, formerly known as the AIFC), President Susan Hockfield put it simply, I am very optimistic about the future of this exceptional community". And so are a lot of us.

The stakeholders alumni/ae, students, MIT administrators - are now working much more effectively together and are focusing more energy on implementing the recommendations of the FSILG Task Force. (The full report can be found at <http://web.mit.edu/dsl/aurora>. Project Aurora is the formal name of the effort to ensure the future of the FSILGs.) A central theme of the report is that realizing the full potential of this exceptional community requires significant contributions and cooperation by all the stakeholders - administration, alumni and students. I think this is what is happening now. Let me highlight here some of the recent events that illustrate this.

MIT has continued to step up its financial and staff commitments. Just a week ago, MIT completed the last of the fiber optic connections to every Boston, Cambridge and Brookline off-campus house. The high speed data connections required for today's learning environment are now the norm everywhere. The Administration also allocated a major sum for the Recruitment & Retention initiative to enable a variety of student and alumni-led projects. Also, the new MIT Provosts Office has requested a look at improving the lease arrangements for the eight chapters which lease land or buildings from MIT. This is a welcome development for the sororities and younger MIT fraternities.

Dean Steve Immerman and others have also worked closely with the Association of Independent Living Groups on two key efforts. The first involves shifting the responsibility for safety and licensing issues to an alumni-run organization. This effort has been embraced by almost all of the chapters, and, most importantly, by the regulatory authorities. An electronic registration of licenses and inspection certificates has been implemented and a Building Safety Facilitator hired. The BSF works with alumni and chapter officers to pre-inspect premises, attend actual inspections, and follow-up on deficiencies needing remedy. The second effort is not yet as well established but is considerably more far-reaching and that is the Accreditation process. This process, similar to a visiting committee in academia or a peer review in industry, has gone through two pilot runs; the most recent one was conducted this past December. Plans are to extend it the entire community during the coming year. Based on the success so far, it will assist chapters in self-assessment and in identifying problems with financial, governance, member development, and behavioral issues.

As their successful recruitment drives demonstrate, the undergraduates are rising to today's challenges. For example, these days parents are more involved in college housing decisions. The student response to this new fact of life was a marketing campaign aimed at parents of incoming freshmen, a portrait of FSILG life and why this is such a special experience. One of the elements in this campaign was a hugely successful and heavily attended brunch for parents who were dropping off their new MIT students at Orientation. Also encouraging is the fact that students, more than ever before, have found time for FSILG-sponsored community and public service work.

All the stakeholders have contributed to the development of an unprecedented array of FSILG-focused courses for this January's Independent Activities Period (IAP). Seventy actives and alums are registered for the Treasurer 101 sessions next week. Over the past three years, T101 has honed a two-day curriculum of fundamental accounting, tailored to the needs of FSILGs. Likewise, House Manager 101 presents a variety of practical information for another key officer, the house manager. And there are three more brand new offerings this year. Alumni Affairs for FSILGs provides a forum to sharing ideas and best practices and understanding the possibilities in the Alumni Associations FSILG toolkit (see <http://alum.mit.edu/ccg/living-groups/fsilg-toolkit.html>). Another new course was developed by FSILG undergraduates and alumni in collaboration with the MIT Leadership Center. It aims at providing chapter presidents and other campus leaders with useful tools for effecting positive change. A Recruitment Boot Camp rounds out the possibilities. Collectively, these courses supplement and even expand the traditional knowledge transfer between the generations in our community.

Alumni/ae giving

MIT's main giving web site was updated recently to feature FSILG needs much more prominently, as you can see at <http://giving.mit.edu/priorities/sll/fsilgs.html>. And, in fact, donations to the Independent Residence Development Fund (IRDF) have returned to previous levels. As I reported last year, the IRDF was expanded to include a new Educational Operating Grant program. This was a direct result of alumni investigation and input. The good news is that this new program has been a major success, and close to \$500,000 has been disbursed to FSILGs, providing a major relief for strained operating budgets.

The bad news is that, due to changing interpretations of IRS case law, there will be future reductions in the educational area percentages, a ratio which sets an upper limit to tax-deductible gifts to FSILGs. And, of course, for those of us who give *directly* to our chapters, there will be no effect since these gifts, though hugely appreciated, do not enjoy the advantage of a tax deduction that the IRDF provides.

In any event, the IRDF, with its traditional low-interest loans and renovation project grants, will remain a key resource for our community. To understand this program better, please see <http://web.mit.edu/irdf/>. These issues are important; sustained investment and giving are needed because a large number of our chapters now require physical renewal.

Alumni Outreach

As part of its mission, the Alumni Association seeks to maintain our links to our chapters and the wider FSILG and MIT communities. They make available not only staff time but an increasingly broad array of electronic tools. It is satisfying to see more chapters and their house corporations taking advantage of these whether it is chapter e-mail lists, a new web site development tool, fundraising or event planning assistance, or just the powerful new directory search capability of the Infinite Connection.

But there is nothing like face-to-face conversation to really engage members of our community. Dean Steve Immerman and I have had the privilege of visiting with hundreds of you at a dozen events sponsored by MIT Clubs across the United States. Meeting directly with alums has proven to be the most effective way to get your best ideas, and to understand today's campus situation. These are energizing experiences for all involved. A few more trips are in the planning stages and will be publicized by your local MIT Club (e.g. the MIT Clubs of Atlanta or Houston). We would love to see you if we come to your region of the country.

At some point in all of this, someone realized there have been no comparable events right here in Massachusetts, home to over 3,000 FSILG alums. This is being rectified. The Club of Southeastern Massachusetts is sponsoring an event on March 7 and the Club of Boston will hold one on January 31. The latter will be held in the spectacular new Stata Center. All are welcome, but please register at <http://bostonclub.mit.edu/events/060131.html>

In closing, let me thank you for your all the care and guidance and for your continued involvement and support. Our collective efforts to strengthen this FSILG community are working, but as with most things in life there is always more to do to pass the gift on to the current and future generations of MIT students.

Thank you,

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