REFLECTION ON THE PROPOSED REX/ORIENTATION CHANGES AND STUDENT RESPONSE

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Summary:

• Earlier this year, Dean Julie Norman’s office was charged with the task of shortening Orientation. Over IAP, Dean Norman spoke to the UA, proposing the following changes:
  – FPOPs will start Thursday and run either 4 or 5 days. (Students taking ASEs would be restricted to 4-day FPOPs.)
  – The latest day for freshmen to arrive on campus will be Monday.
  – The Housing Readjustment Lottery will still close on Tuesday afternoon.

• The reason cited for reexamining orientation was:
  “We have the longest Orientation in the country, at 7 days...It’s a problem in that we see students losing their energy and participation. Faculty are concerned that, by the time they arrive at class, they’re worn out. The Chancellor has asked us to step back and say what is essential and critical.” (Norman, as summarized in UA E2 minutes)

• The administration has repeatedly asserted that the proposed changes will not reduce REX, as many students who participate in FPOPs will be on campus before Monday, and dorms could hold REX events in the evenings since FPOPs will be expected to end around 5 p.m.

Student Perspectives:

Last year, there were 3 days during which all new freshmen were on campus before the Housing Readjustment Lottery closed, guaranteeing all students at least 3 days of REX before having to make a final housing decision. The proposed plan brought to the UA would shorten this minimum time to only 1 day.

REX provides crucial information and opportunities for freshmen to make the right decision about which dorm they want to live in, and shortening it would put unreasonable pressure on incoming freshmen, making it more difficult to choose the right living community.

One remedy suggested by the administrators was that incoming freshmen can use CPW and the i3 materials to make their housing decision.

Response:

• Many students cannot attend CPW (cost, time, distance, wait-listed).

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CPW is meant to be a way for prospective students to decide if MIT is the right college for them to attend, and the simultaneous pressure to choose a dorm could get in the way of making the correct college choice.

The i3 videos give only the vaguest sense of a dorm; they highlight a few cool things that happen, rather than giving an overall sense of dorm culture.

It is difficult to get a true sense of any dorm's culture without actually being on campus and meeting people.

An argument presented asserting that REX will not actually be shortened was that freshmen can explore dorms while on campus for their FPOPs.

Response:

- Students' participation in FPOPs will cut into time that was previously used for REX events.
- Some FPOPs have typically held events in the evenings and some take place off-campus.
- Pressuring freshmen to explore dorms during their FPOPs will encourage them to spend time late at night participating in REX instead of sleeping, and students will therefore be more tired during the REX events they participate in, decreasing the quality of the information they get.

The motivation behind shortening REX/Orientation is to prevent freshmen from being worn out at the beginning of term.

Response:

- There are so many important decisions to be made during Orientation (picking classes, learning groups, dorms, ASEs, Math Diagnostic) that trying to pack them into an even smaller amount of time will cause incoming freshmen to be more stressed and worn out once classes start.
- Students will feel the need to explore the dorms to the same extent regardless of the length of REX, which would encourage them to stay up late and participate in more events during the one day before the housing lottery closes, which will cause them to get less sleep and be less well rested.

For more information, see...

- The letter from the dorm presidents to the Tech and Chancellor Clay detailing their objections to the new orientation schedule.
- Dean Hastings's letter to the Tech.
- The minutes and summary from the UA emergency meeting with Julie Norman over IAP.

Feel free to e-mail asingham@mit.edu with further questions