

Report of the MIT Task Force on Fraternities, Sororities, and Independent Living Groups: Status and Future Development

**Final Report
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1 Introduction

The MIT Fraternity, Sorority, and Independent Living Group community has been an important part of MIT since 1873 when, just 12 years after the founding of the Institute, the first fraternity chapter was colonized. During the century and a quarter since then, the community has adapted to the evolving needs and expectations of students, society, and the Institute to provide MIT students with valued living-group choices. Most alumni remember their Fraternity, Sorority, and Independent Living Group experience as quite positive and quite unlike those at other universities.

Generally, we refer to the Fraternity, Sorority, and Independent Living Group community as the FSILG community. Definitions for such acronyms, which appear frequently in our report, can be found in the glossary.

At present, there are 27 fraternities on campus, five sororities, and five independent living groups (ILGs). All of the fraternities are residential; one is co-ed. Three of the five sororities are residential; the first was founded in 1984. Houses are generally owned by alumni house corporations.

Approximately 800 students live in fraternities, which is 65% of legal capacity; approximately 100 students live in residential sororities, which is 90% of legal capacity; and approximately 100 students live in ILGs, which is 60% of legal capacity.

Of the five independent living groups, three—Epsilon Theta, pika (lower-case *p*), and Fenway House—were formerly chapters of national fraternities. Epsilon Theta, although a member of the Living Group Council considers itself to be a local fraternity. Two, Student House, founded in 1930, and the Women’s Independent Living Group (WILG), founded in 1976, were never connected to national groups. All five independent living groups are residential and all but WILG are co-ed.

1.1 The Problem

During the past decade, problems have emerged that put the system at risk. It is natural to wonder why, and various factions argue that it is the fault of society, the students, the alumni, or the administration. We believe there is blame enough for all to have a portion, but it is pointless to tease out which group should get how much. It is time to put the past to rest, look to the future, and build the excellent system only MIT can have.

1.2 The Charge

The Freshmen On Campus (FOC) policy, which was decided upon in 1998, and first implemented in 2002, introduced a discontinuity that amplified some pre-existing problems in communication,

finance, and governance. Three FSILG chapters have been closed or temporarily suspended for behavioral infractions. Somewhat more than twice that number have made a successful transition, measured, for example, in terms of recruiting success. The majority lie somewhere in between.

The successful transitions were enabled by the joint effort of MIT's administration, students, and alumni, working together, so it is tempting to assume that the FSILGs that have been relatively unsuccessful have made less effort to adjust or have less to offer. Such a conclusion would be wrong, however, because there are examples of wholesome FSILGs that have had problems in spite of expending enormous effort. For such FSILGs, unintended consequences of the FOC transition emerged, as they generally do in complex systems, and the transition has not been as smooth or rapid as hoped.

Thus, while significant investments by many stakeholders have been made over the past three years, more work needs to be done. Accordingly, in the spring of 2003 President Vest asked us to come together as a task force to study the following:

- Benefits of the FSILG system
- Recruiting problems faced by the FSILG system
- Connection between recruiting success and transition funding
- Role of alumni
- Strength of FSILG support mechanisms
- MIT leadership challenges
- Facilities, operations, and finances
- Relationship with local government agencies
- Relocation of houses to MIT owned land in Cambridge.

Details are provided in the complete charge, reproduced in Appendix I.

1.3 Themes

To address the charge, we have read, listened, studied, visited, and debated our way to findings, conclusions, goals, and metrics, all with a view toward developing a plan for moving forward. Our plan reflects these overall themes:

- The FSILG system contributes importantly to MIT's success and greatly benefits many students at MIT.
- All the stakeholders—administration, alumni, and students—must learn to work together better.
- All the stakeholders—administration, alumni, and students—have substantial work to do.

The first theme is value, and we discuss FSILG contributions to educational goals and student life at some length. We believe the contributions shift and change with shifts and changes in society, but as we see it, the contributions are unlikely to disappear. FSILGs offer a type of passage from family life to adult life that have ancient roots.

Of course, FSILG membership is not for everyone. A student might be uncomfortable with the gung-ho aspects of a typical fraternity or sorority, or the shared housekeeping and food-preparation responsibilities of a cooperative, or the mixed-gender living of most ILGs.

For those who do find FSILG living attractive, however, there are many benefits of membership in an ideal FSILG of the kind we touch on in this report. These benefits make membership in an FSILG a privilege, but membership is certainly not a right, because problem FSILGs should be shut down and entire FSILG systems have been shut down by other universities.

The second theme is working together. FSILG students and alumni have felt disenfranchised from MIT. They have felt that their collective place within the residence system and the larger community has been lost. They believe the freshman-housing decision makes both prospective members and parents think that FSILGs are somehow a lesser and more dangerous option for student living. Most notably, the feeling is widely held that MIT's administration is out to destroy the FSILGs.

These perceptions persist even though MIT has and continues to do a great deal to help the FSILGs be successful. For example, President Vest and Chancellor Clay are quick to emphasize their support of the FSILG system, both privately and publicly, and they have backed their words with action. During the past three years MIT provided 1.5 million dollars in direct transition financial support; MIT has grown staff of the FSILG office from one person to four; MIT has provided the start up funding and the space for the highly effective FSILG Cooperative; MIT has created the new position of Director of FSILG Alumni Relations.

MIT has also responded to initiatives proposed by FSILG alumni leadership, who have developed many ways to create partnerships within the FSILG community. The FSILG Cooperative, for one, was the creation of the Association for Independent Living Groups (AILG) and especially its chairman, Dan Geer. MIT support was, however, critical to getting it off the ground. Another example is the leadership and commitment shown by the alumni of Phi Kappa Sigma in the creation of the IRDF Grants program, first for educationally related physical renovations and now for educationally related operating costs as well.

The original Independent Residence Development Fund (IRDF), established in the 1960s, provided long-term low-interest loans (typically 3 per cent) for the improvement or expansion of fraternity houses. In the years since then, hundreds of alumni have contributed to the fund, which has grown to over 19 million dollars in assets. Contributions are tax-deductible to alumni and are for the most part collected as part of the Alumni Association's Annual Fund Drive. Currently 49 loans are outstanding to the alumni house corporations of all but 6 of the 37 MIT FSILG chapters.

In 1997, the IRDF program was expanded to include a grant program for renovating educational areas and improving handicap access. Four houses have since taken advantage of this to reduce their IRDF loan principal amounts. Currently, a further enhancement to the IRDF program is under consideration. This proposal would permit IRDF funds to pay for annual operating expenses associated with the areas of the ILG residence that are used for educational purposes. Such areas would typically include study rooms, libraries, and computer laboratories.

Thus, energetic and positive actions have been taken by MIT's administration, just as there have been energetic and positive actions by FSILG students and alumni. Nevertheless, strong feelings persist among some members of our wider FSILG community. MIT's administration, students, and alumni are all known to have interpreted "you need to do more" as "you are not doing anything." Evidently, the task of rebuilding trust and cooperation requires both more work and more positive attitudes on the part of all stakeholders.

Fundamentally, the success of each stakeholder is necessary for the overall success. All should commit to goal-directed governance, fluid communication, and open decision processes that ensure access to all stakeholders involved; all should aim for a climate characterized by consistency, predictability, fairness, and behavior standards that embrace the entire campus; all should recognize that independent status brings additional responsibilities. None of us operates in a vacuum. Liberty is freedom from arbitrary and despotic control, not anarchy.

The third theme is the work still remaining to be done. The transition from four years of undergraduates living in FSILGs to three is not yet complete and requires additional support and adaptation. The system is not sustainable as it currently exists. Specific additional steps have to be taken now, with administration, staff, students, house corporations, and alumni developing mechanisms for working together to reaching consensus on detailed implementation.

Of course, part of the process is articulating concrete goals and thinking carefully together about alternative ways to approach those goals, with special attention to the potential for unintended consequences. This should be natural for engineers and scientists, especially those who adhere to the idea that sensible people ask *why* down to five levels (a maxim championed in W. Edwards Deming in his writings on American industry).

1.4 Context and Contributions

Many past studies have focused on student life and the residential system, and a full understanding of the issues requires an understanding of not only our conclusions and recommendations but also those captured in the documents listed in Appendix II. As a collection, they demonstrate that as MIT evolves, so too will its residential system, and so too will the views of those who study the system.

In this study, we have tried to be sensitive both to perpetual characteristics of maturing men and women and to today's realities and societal expectations. We have also tried to show how an ideal FSILG system contributes to the intensity and excitement of an MIT education and operates in support of MIT's core principles of societal responsibility, learning by doing, and education as preparation for life.

Our product is a general plan focused on improving communication, solving financial problems, enabling successful recruiting, managing the transition, identifying roles and responsibilities, and addressing long-range housing needs. We offer a general plan, and do not prescribe details, because we believe that details are better worked out through the joint effort of elected students, alumni, and MIT officials who ultimately have to implement, act, and persevere.

Recognizing a need for action, we have helped to initiate action as we progressed through our study, and we are pleased that work on some tasks in our plan are already in progress. In general, however, much urgent work remains to be done to ensure that an extraordinarily important, differentiating, and irreplaceable asset will survive and prosper.

2 Findings

Early in our work, we decided to inform ourselves about the current status of the FSILG system by reviewing previous reports, by listening to the views of various experts and stakeholders, by gathering together statistical data, and especially by visiting FSILGs and talking with members. All of this fresh exposure helped to both confirm and correct our initial biases, which in some cases were formed many years ago. All four mechanisms were of great value to us, and we believe any group charged with FSILG study should immerse itself similarly and especially to include many FSILG visits in their work. Each of our visits added something new to our thinking.

Appendix II identifies previous reports; Appendix III lists those with whom we have talked; and Appendix IV lists the FSILGs we have visited. In this section, we summarize.

2.1 Talking with alumni

All of us have talked on many occasions to alumni of the FSILG system. Nevertheless, we thought it would be helpful to engage with alumni at a meeting of the Association of Independent Living Groups (AILG) with a view toward understanding what alumni recall. Of the forty or so present, some were recently graduated; others were graduated a half-century ago. Most are active in house corporations, and collectively represent about 60% of the house corporations.

All subscribed to the view attributed to the much-revered Dean Fred Fassett to the effect that 50% of an MIT education takes place outside the classroom.

Some points raised were expected because they were common topics in discussions with current FSILG members. These included points centered on the help provided by FSILGs in coping with the stresses of MIT. Several offered phrases such as “I don’t think I would have made it through without my big brother” and “I learned to enjoy teamwork and group success,” with great feeling. Others stressed the value of leadership skills acquired.

Many emphasized the view that their FSILG experience wonderfully endowed them with project management skills that they then came to practice throughout their professional lives. Several expressed the view that these skills were more important than their classroom education.

Others focused on the development of social skills through FSILG living in general and rush in particular. One alumnus remarked, with much confirming nodding around the room, “Striking up a conversation with a total stranger was an unnatural act for me,” explaining that rush forced the development of social skills.

Others talked about help adjusting to MIT, having come from small high schools in parts of the country that do not generally send young people to big-name universities far from home. They observed that their FSILG community of thirty or forty made it much easier to adjust to the larger community of a thousand classmates.

In the same vein, another alumnus observed that he was shy and never would have held a skill-building office during his undergraduate years were it not a natural part of living in an FSILG. He spoke about how it is easier to get started in a small group, especially one which offers a positive environment in which to try new things and learn from mistakes. He emphasized the multiplying effect on experience that follows from having a large number of relatively small FSILGs, each of which comes with a range of office-holding opportunities. Others spoke to the early introduction to responsibilities. Still others emphasized the choice and ownership perspectives, otherwise absent in undergraduate life, and the development of responsibility and determination that goes with choice and ownership.

Several spoke of the FSILG experience as the most defining experience in their lives, saying that they would not be what they were today were it not for the experience. One alumnus said that he felt that after 54 years of working with his fraternity, he still had yet to pay back the debt.

Many also spoke of the value of the FSILG experience in building networks that extend not only horizontally, across a graduating class, but vertically, across many classes. Many houses have reunions every year, which means that on graduation, a member has experienced three reunions before graduation, which naturally develops a sense of being part of a long tradition. One alumnus pointed out, with great pride, that because of his FSILG, he has interacted with people from the class of 1922 to the class of 2007, a span of 85 years.

2.2 Visiting the FSILGs

During the spring and fall semesters of 2003, we visited 14 of the 27 fraternities, three of the five sororities, and all of the five independent living groups. Each visit involved from one to several task-force members. In some cases, discussions were during and after dinner with a half-dozen FSILG members; in other cases, discussions were town-meeting style, with well over half the FSILG members involved. There was no fixed agenda; instead, task-force members would open with one of a few standard questions, which generally led in directions governed by the members.

2.2.1 An atmosphere of hostility continues

Many students feel that MIT’s administration fails to understand the value of the FSILG system. Others believe that MIT administration intends for the system to dissolve or change into a collection of houseless social clubs. There is a general sense that decisions are made behind closed doors by

people underinformed about, and disinterested in, student views. One student summed up a general feeling when he said “We wish they would treat us more like constituents and less like sheep.”

Among the concerns raised, the problem of rush was especially prominent, and there was a general sense that rush placement in the calendar has not been sensitive to student needs during the recent past.

Another concern centered on community building. FSILG members often believe that MIT believes that FSILGs interfere with community building; on the contrary, FSILG members believe FSILGs are prime promoters of community building, not only through their own internal activities but also through participation in campus activities and sports, through joint activities among multiple FSILGs, and through campus-wide initiatives, including not only social events but also charity drives and community service events.

2.2.2 Students value FSILG membership

As we visited the FSILGs, we commonly asked about FSILG benefits relative to other living options. Among the most common responses, the support-network idea was especially salient and spontaneously offered. Generally, those who had spent their freshman years in residence halls characterized their experience as marked by uninviting, closed doors. Many felt that a high density of single rooms in the residence halls has a chilling effect on getting to know people. They felt they formed more friendships and deeper friendships in their FSILGs, which then became extremely important in times of stress. Many students emphasized their FSILG support network included help with coursework as well as stress.

Also frequent were remarks about decompression. Many students felt that living in Boston instead of Cambridge was important to the decompression effect. One referred to the Charles River as “our moat,” a thought applauded by all the others present.

Others felt that the social life offered was important. Social events planned by MIT were not held in high esteem. Social events planned by the FSILGs are viewed as a lot more fun; they include not only parties but also events that range from community-service–social-event combinations to organized expeditions to the circus. Individual fraternities and sororities often pair up.

Still others felt strongly about the contribution to a sort of school spirit, and many remarked that the relative absence of big-draw sport events at MIT made FSILGs particularly important.

And many cited the opportunity to learn useful skills, ranging from leadership to financial management, from managing people to erecting drywall.

2.2.3 Risk management and drinking remain a serious concern

Abundant evidence indicates that there are FSILGs, especially among the fraternities, that manage risk poorly and engage in both illegal and risky drinking. It would be wrong to quote what we say on the subject without noting that we believe that the same can be said for the rest of MIT’s residence system, that the problem is national as well as local, that progress has been made toward containing the problem at MIT, that more progress must be made, that more progress will be made, and that MIT will do all that reasonably can be done in both the FSILGs and the residence halls.

That said, we have observed not only poor risk management and illegal and risk drinking practices but also attitudes that range over defiance, ignorance, and denial. For example, a chapter officer and IFC official told us that IFC risk management policies were systematically ignored in his house because no one was truly interested in enforcing them. Several students have told us privately that if anyone becomes ill from drinking, that person is taken to Massachusetts General Hospital, rather than the MIT Infirmary, out of fear of punishment. Others tell us that an ill student would be

taken to a residence hall on campus before help was called, similarly to avoid attribution. A student from a chapter with a long history of drinking problems told us that all the charges against his house were “bullshit.”

This is not meant as an indictment of the attitudes of every FSILG; indeed, many FSILGs have effective rules, effectively enforced, and such chapters express concern over the behavior of their peers. It is clear, however, that they are not capable of much, if any, influence over the more risk-prone chapters.

2.3 Statistics

We felt it important to gather together as much hard data as possible to shape our thinking and guide our deliberations. Accordingly, we asked Rick Gresh, Assistant Director of Student Life programs, to determine what existing information might be of use to us. Mr. Gresh worked with Lydia Snover, Assistant to the Provost for Institutional Research, Iria Romano, Assistant Registrar, and Daniel Trujillo, Associate Dean for Community Development and Substance Abuse Programs. Ms. Snover was, in turn, assisted by Greg Harris and Christine Mokher.

Together, they collected a great deal of intriguing information, from a variety of sources. These included the 2000 CORE Institute Alcohol & Other Drug Survey (mailed; sample of undergraduate student population), 2003 Health Survey (on-line; sample of undergraduate student population), 2002 First-Year Survey (on-line; all first-year students), 2003 First-Year Survey (on-line; all first-year students), 2002 Consortium for Financing Higher Education (COFHE) Senior Survey (on-line; undergraduate seniors), 2003 COFHE Enrolled Student Survey (on-line, all undergraduates), 2000 COFHE Alumni Survey (mailed; classes of 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994) 2003 MIT Founders Study (on-line; ongoing). Collectively these shed considerable light on questions ranging from alumni giving to problem behavior. We review highlights and surprises here.

2.3.1 Do FSILGs give back more to the Institute as alumni?

One prominent way that alumni give something back is by developing careers at MIT. At present, about 135 faculty members were MIT undergraduates, (13.5%). Of these, about half were from FSILGs, which is out of proportion to the historical 30% of the undergraduates in the FSILG system.

Another way is through participation in chapter and MIT activities as alumni. Many FSILG alumni do this, contributing generously of their time, serving Educational Councilors or as members of visiting committees, by helping with fund drives, by working on FSILG house corporations or helping through the Association of Independent Living Groups (AILG).

Still another prominent way that alumni give something back is by giving money. The percent of alumni that give favors FSILG members slightly during the past 20 years (74% versus 71%). Not surprisingly the amount of the annual donation per alumnus or alumna increases with time since graduation.

Reaching back to 1920, the amount given annually by FSILG alumni is 3.5 times higher than others (\$892 versus \$252). Interestingly, of the 34 people whose average annual gift was in excess of \$100,000, 85% lived in FSILGs. Of those whose annual gifts were in the top 5% (\$567), 73% lived in FSILGs.

Thus, FSILG membership seems to be highly correlated with larger donations. Part of the difference might be higher income. Analysis of data collected for classes reaching back to 1979 indicates that the average FSILG graduate earns more (about \$18,000/year) than residence-hall students.

2.3.2 Do FSILGs foster an entrepreneurial spirit?

FSILG and residence-hall students answer many questions without statistically significant differences. However, several questions aimed at assessing entrepreneurial spirit indicate that FSILG members believe they are more interested in starting companies and that they are less risk averse. For example, high-risk/high-payoff ventures appealed to FSILG members at twice the percentage of others (24% versus 12%). Also, a much higher percentage feels they would take an opportunity to join a startup (20% versus 12%), and a smaller percentage feels it is smarter to build a career in an established firm (13% versus 20%).

There are two ways to account for these numbers: the tendencies are developed in the FSILGs or people with these tendencies are drawn to FSILGs. In one case, valued characteristics are developed; in the other, a desired option is offered to a valued group.

2.3.3 Do FSILGs promote academic excellence?

Data from the Registrar indicates that junior-year GPAs, controlled for gender, school, ethnicity, citizenship, and credit units are not significantly different between members of FSILGs and residence-hall students.

Credit units are, however, a statistically significant predictor of GPA; GPA rises slightly as units rise. Because FSILG members on average take one less subject during their undergraduate years, there is a corresponding small reduction in the junior-year male GPA in FSILG members relative to residence-hall students (4.19 versus 4.30). Females who are FSILG members do slightly better than residence-hall students, but not at a statistically significant level (4.28 versus 4.27).

2.3.4 Do FSILGs promote participation in campus life?

Students in all living groups spend about the same amount of time on jobs, student government, musical groups, theatrical productions, religious organizations, and volunteer work.

FSILG members spend about four hours more per week on athletics, physical fitness, and other health-related activities than residents of residence halls; FSILG members spend about one hour per week less on clubs; and FSILG members spend many hours on FSILG-based activities, but we have no data on just how many.

The substantial differences center on participation in activities that enable FSILG members to interact with potential members.

For example, during pre-class orientation, approximately ten incoming freshmen are assigned to a volunteer upperclassman orientation leader, a sort of guide who answers their questions and gets them to where they are supposed to be. 94% of male orientation leaders and 80% of female orientation leaders were FSILG members. 84% of orientation coordinators were FSILG members (21 of 25 during past seven years). Of the associate advisors, 65% were FSILG members.

Similarly, a substantially higher percentage of FSILG members host prospective students during Campus Preview Weekend (28% versus 19%). The yield on admitted male prospects hosted by fraternities and independent living group members is higher (79% versus 73%); for females, the yield on those hosted by sorority members is also higher (74% versus 67%). Such differences are considered highly significant in admissions circles.

To get a quick feel for participation in varsity sports, we checked the percentage of the 294 sophomore, junior, and senior men who both participate in varsity sports and live in a fraternity or independent living group. Freshmen men do not live in fraternities; numbers for women were not readily available at the time this report was written.

Again, the differences were dramatic. Although fewer men live in fraternities, they outnumbered residence-hall members by a factor of 2 (60% in fraternities versus 28% in residence halls versus 12% outside the system).

2.3.5 Do FSILGs create strong support networks for students?

The numbers available did not reveal as much as we would like to know about the degree to which people in various settings help one another through the most difficult problems. Nevertheless it was interesting to note the following:

- FSILG members were considerably more likely to ask another student for advice on a personal problem (84% versus 65% for males; 84% versus 76% overall).
- FSILG members indicated a stronger development of self esteem (56% versus 43%).
- FSILG members reported stronger abilities to resolve interpersonal conflict (58% versus 43%).
- FSILG members seemed to have more confidence in their connection to the faculty in that a higher percentage felt they could get a good letter of recommendation from a faculty member (70% versus 56%)

2.3.6 Do FSILGs instill values in their members?

The development of values is measured by survey questions aimed at volunteering in the community and on campus, attendance at various sorts of meetings, and various dimensions of self assessment. There were many more similarities than differences. Of the differences, FSILG members spent more time on volunteer work connected with campus-related volunteer service, part of which can be accounted for by participation in activities connected with recruiting. FSILG members were seven times more likely to attend meetings on alcohol use or abuse, presumably because many FSILGs require such attendance as part of their risk-management or new-member-education programs.

2.3.7 Do FSILGs have more drinking problems?

Data provided Daniel Trujillo, Associate Dean for Community Development and Substance Abuse Programs, indicates that members of fraternities and sororities, both nationally and at MIT, drink more than students in residence halls.

Although the national and local survey data available are not perfectly aligned, some numbers invite comparison nevertheless. For example, from data on the percentage of male students who have had five or more drinks at a sitting during the two-week period prior to filling out a survey, the following emerges:

- Nationally, fraternity members engage in more heavy drinking than members of MIT fraternities (75% versus 28%).
- Nationally, male non-fraternity members engage in more heavy drinking than members of MIT fraternities (49% versus 28%).
- Locally, fraternity members at MIT engage in more heavy drinking than male students in MIT residence halls (roughly 28% versus 9%).

We note that MIT students overall drink less than the national average, presumably because MIT's policies and programs are effective, or because MIT attracts fewer problem drinkers, or because MIT students perceive drinking to interfere with studies, sports, or other matters they deem important.

Nevertheless, the numbers indicate that there is a great need for improvement throughout the MIT residence system, especially in the fraternities. Statistics indicate 25% of all MIT students engage at least once a month in drinking games: evidently MIT is not immune to that portion of the heavy drinking attributable to adolescent behavior problems.

Because there there is considerably more heavy drinking in fraternities, a natural question emerges: do fraternities attract people who are inclined toward heavy drinking or do fraternities create heavy drinkers? Statistical evidence indicates both are a factor.

We note in passing that drinking practices vary widely, and the characteristics of a category should not be presumed to be a characteristic of a subcategory or an individual FSILG. Drinking is a troubling problem concentrated in fraternities as a subcategory, but not every fraternity has a major problem, nor is drinking a major problem in the sororities and the ILGs. Laudably, all of the sororities and most of the ILGs do not serve alcohol at their social events. Laudably, sororities also do not participate with fraternities in mixers where alcohol is served, although alcohol agreements worked out by risk managers are not always honored at party time.

2.3.8 What factors most influence a student's decision to join an FSILG?

A great deal of information has been collected on the freshman view of housing options. Of this data, perhaps the most interesting element is the degree to which freshmen value various sources of information connected with the decision to join or not to join an FSILG. The top five most influential were conversations with members, chapter events, exposure during Campus Preview Weekend, conversations with first-year members, and conversations with nonmembers, all of which are variations on face-to-face contact. Less important were all written forms of communication, including overview books, web pages, and CDs.

Unfortunately, there was no question aimed directly at determining how freshmen decided to look at the FSILG system in the first instance. Many MIT students in FSILGs report that they had no expectation of joining at the time of admission, but changed their minds once they understood that MIT FSILGs are not stereotypical. Thus, the low weight freshmen placed on summer contact should not be construed to mean that summer contact was not worthwhile—it may well be a key to the stimulation of initial interest that leads to exposure to the information that leads to joining. Also, it is worth noting that summer contact in the year studied was highly attenuated.

2.4 Financial Assessment

While no generalization applies to every chapter, most FSILGs have been, for a significant period, decapitalizing their value so as to keep house bills low. Many factors have contributed to this condition, and understanding each factor is important to resolving the financial problems of the FSILG Community:

- Campus demographics changed the traditional gender mix from which chapters recruited members.
- A buyer's market for potential members challenged long-standing FSILG marketing practices. Also, marketing no longer stops with membership; new members have to be persuaded to move in at the beginning of their sophomore year.
- The FOC decision further disrupted recruitment and membership patterns and these, in turn, disrupted cash flows.
- The FOC decision created a climate of uncertainty exacerbating already inadequate investments.
- Inadequate financial planning, management, and coordination among alumni and undergraduate FSILG leaders surfaced serious pricing and operational deficiencies as the FOC decision stressed the system.
- Concerns about MIT's commitment to the FSILG system and about inadequate financial focus has discouraged alumni from giving.

On average, FSILGs have not set prices consistent with their value; have not charged members according to actual costs; have not coordinated budgets and planning between house-owning alumni corporations and undergraduate chapters; and have not adequately invested in their properties, collected from their members, solicited donations from their alumni, budgeted for depreciation, or

managed their expenses. Many of these conditions existed prior to the FOC decision, but were masked by a relatively steady supply of new members.

The transition financial support already committed has provided much needed assistance to many FSILGs. As they continue to regain their footing, additional support is needed, however, and it is clearly in the interest of MIT to provide further assistance in the realignment of the FSILG financial environment. Aside from FSILG contributions to MIT's educational goals, they also represent a significant, perhaps critical, low-cost housing resource. The loss of that housing resource would have implications across MIT's entire housing and capital spectrum. The replacement value of the nearly 1500 beds is in excess of \$100,000 per student, \$100 million for the total, not including land costs and opportunity costs. Thus, it is important that MIT continue to support the transition of the FSILG system to a stabilized and sustainable condition. Such support includes facilitation of alumni giving, continued financial-transition program funding, and enhanced alumni and undergraduate financial training.

For further information, see the detailed financial analysis prepared by Chris Rezek of the FSILG Cooperative in Appendix V.

3 Conclusions

In this section, we move further from fact and more toward opinion. Our purpose is to deliver our overall assessment of the system in light of what we have learned and in light of what we believe an ideal system should do. Of course our conclusions are the product, in part, of who we are. In evaluating our report, therefore, it is important to understand not only our methods but also our characteristics. Some of us are undergraduates, others were undergraduates quite some time ago; most of us are or were MIT students; most of us belonged to FSILGs at MIT or elsewhere; of those associated with MIT FSILGs, we include members of fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups; and among us are faculty and staff, as well as alumni and current students. On the other hand, we do share two common characteristics: none of us is part of the MIT system responsible for FSILG development and oversight; and none of us is hostile to the FSILG idea.

3.1 FSILGs are living-and-learning laboratories

We have encountered those who view FSILGs as support groups; as transitional environments where students are on their own, but not alone; as communities of people who agree to aspire to promoting character; as collections of people predestined to misbehave; and as training camps for a competitive world.

Each view, taken to an extreme, leads its proponents to differing beliefs about what constitutes success. The community and character faction, for example, puts high value on community service. The misbehavior faction associates success with staying out of trouble. The support-group faction likes to hear testimony about how FSILGs keep students sane and stable. The transitional-environment faction values evidence of adult behavior. The training-camp faction wants to see students develop an entrepreneurial spirit.

Because views differ and because each can be strongly held, people often talk past one another when discussing FSILG status and future directions. Acrimony chain reacts.

Our approach is to think of FSILGs as living-and-learning laboratories where students develop a variety of skills that are valuable throughout life both before and after commencement. We think this view subsumes the others, acknowledges that FSILGs offer many benefits, and recognizes that there are multiple ways to achieve excellence.

3.2 The FSILG system is a system of systems

The FSILG system is and should be viewed as a system of three systems because fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups differ from one another with respect to how they operate and contribute. Sororities, for example, recruit according to Panhellenic Association rules; many fraternity and ILG members view some of those rules as rigid and unnatural. Fraternities and sororities often compete with one another in various ways; many ILG members view such competition as strange and undesirable. ILGs take pride in their mixed-gender family-style ambience; most fraternities and all sororities are single gender.

Even within the three subsystems, there is a wide range of missions, styles, and approaches. Fundamentally, this diversity is a good thing, helping to ensure that there is a place in the system for everyone who seeks its benefits.

In our work, we have focused most of our attention on the fraternities because they have more severe problems than the sororities and because there are five times as many fraternities as independent living groups. Each group has special needs, however, that should be recognized.

The independent living groups, for example, are less closely knit together than the fraternities and sororities. Their governing body, the Living Group Council (LGC), is less active than the IFC and the Panhellenic Association, partly because there are far fewer members to take on roles and tasks and partly because there is such a wide range of missions and styles within this group. One result is that the LGC is often overlooked when student representatives are need to serve on committees and task forces. Accordingly, the responsible and relevant Institute offices should work harder to recognize the LGC's representative role and help it become a more effective governance organization.

Likewise, the sororities have special characteristics, especially in the conduct of their recruitment process, which is much more structured than fraternity and ILG rush and more focused on mutual identification of the best fit between sororities and potential new members. The sorority rush process spans a five day period during which potential new members visit decreasing numbers of the sororities, but visit them all. The process requires that a group of sorority members become neutral guides and resources for potential new members throughout the formal recruitment period. This requires that they distance themselves from their affiliation, most notably that they physically remove themselves from their facilities. Thus, there are two kinds of exceptional logistics problems that MIT can help with: reserving campus rooms where rush events can be held and finding reasonable, low-cost housing for the neutral guides.

3.3 The MIT FSILG system requires urgent attention

The MIT FSILG system is at risk. Many houses have shown signs of entering a downward spiral in which financial and membership problems lead to despair, which leads to less effective recruiting, which leads to more despair. In some cases, the despair exacerbates behavioral problems, which leads to disciplinary action, which lead to a sense that MIT's administration is adversarial, which leads to more despair and worse behavior. After a few times around this loop, a house could easily end up with either a defiant or what's-the-use-anyway attitude and a complete behavioral breakdown.

Several factors contribute to the at-risk state of the system. First, hostility is in the air. We cannot know how valuable the FSILG system can be until MIT's administration, students, house corporations, and alumni come to work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.

Second, financial problems remain acute. The financial problems faced by many FSILGs absorb energy that should be expended on expanding opportunities and correcting problems. We cannot know how valuable the FSILG system can be until the financial problems are brought under control.

Third, problems with drinking remain serious. Many fraternities practice very poor risk management practices. In those fraternities, members with unacceptable attitudes about drinking represent a danger to themselves and other students and to the viability of the system every bit as immediate and comprehensive as the financial problems.

Finally, rush and recruitment policies and procedures are still changing. During the first year of the FOC policy, rush was held during a popular period for midterm examinations. Not surprisingly, results were disastrous for many houses, particularly those that like to attract candidates who are particularly studious. In our recommended plan, we explain why we place rush after orientation but before classes. Once it is there for two or three years, we will have a much better understanding of the steady-state recruitment rate.

Thus, the transition is not over. At least several years of energetic effort will be required to bring the FSILG system back to full health.

3.4 An important educational asset lies underused

Many observers think it odd to have approximately the same number of fraternities as a half century ago even though the fraction of males in the undergraduate population has fallen from more than 98% to less than 60% while the undergraduate population has remained roughly constant. Now, the FOC policy has reduced the number of males who can live in a house by 25% more. Although some fraternities have maintained a good balance between members and available living space, others have (or will have after 2004 or 2005 graduation) seriously fewer members than needed for financial viability, a problem that is shared by all of the ILGs.

MIT sororities do not have a serious excess-capacity problem for several reasons. First, MIT's female population has been growing, not shrinking; second, Panhellenic Association rules prevent the introduction of a new sorority if any existing sorority lacks members; and third, by tradition at MIT, total membership is generally much larger than house capacity for those sororities that have houses. Nevertheless, at least one sorority has decided to focus its rush on candidates interested in living in its house, having had some difficulty in filling its house to capacity.

One could take the laissez-faire view that market forces can and will correct what is essentially an excess-capacity problem in the fraternities and ILGs in time. Unfortunately, everyone assumes or at least wants it to be some other house that fails. And unfortunately, market forces may not preserve a house with a century-long tradition or a house that offers a particularly wholesome and valued option. For example, one could easily design a rush and recruitment system that would favor party-oriented FSILGs and hinder scholarship-oriented FSILGs by, say, holding rush during midterms.

What might a fraternity or ILG do in a membership crisis? One logical option for a fraternity might be to recognize the gender shift by disconnecting from their national organization and becoming a two-gender ILG. Many would not welcome such a move, noting that national organizations often provide extremely useful services, such as leadership training, status review, programming, financial support, and carefully thought-out procedures and guidelines. From the membership perspective, becoming a two-gender ILG probably would not make sense anyway, inasmuch as the ILGs are far from free of membership problems. Other options include: changing mission so as to fill a niche not currently filled; finding a merger partner; disbanding; and becoming a chapter without a house. Of these, changing mission is difficult; and merger and disbandment are both difficult and painful; and while becoming a chapter without a house is an idea that has some advocates, many are extremely hostile to the idea because they believe that the living-and-learning benefits of FSILGs are largely lost with the loss of house ownership.

In light of all the positive benefits of the FSILG system, none of these approaches is the bold, forward look. We should not be thinking of how to handle an overcapacity problem, but rather how

to leverage an underused asset. Each vacant spot in a well-behaved FSILG translates to one less person who benefits from the living-and-learning skills to which alumni, students, logic, and the numbers all testify. The best solution, then, is to fill the slots, not eliminate them.

One of the tasks in our recommended plan is aimed directly at filling the slots—by providing for a rush period before classes begin, by providing controlled summer access to incoming students, by suggesting the funding of additional rush and recruitment activities, and by encouraging alumni involvement. Others tasks help to fill the slots indirectly by demonstrating that MIT will support the FSILG system in the long term and by taking action that increases FSILG health and appeal. Beyond these specific recommendations, we expect that with imagination and effort, MIT’s administration, alumni, and students will find additional ways to co-market MIT and the FSILG system to prospective students and market the FSILG system to students on and after arrival.

We also discussed, but did not reach conclusions about several other options that would encourage movement into the FSILGs. For example, MIT could require everyone to move after their freshman year, thus breaking down the natural inertia that tends to leave residence-hall students in the same place for four years. The Potter report of 1989, which recommended the FOC policy, also suggested that movement from one residence hall to another is a good thing, because it widens a student’s circle of friends and acquaintances. While appealing from the Potter perspective, students in residence halls would be quick to point out that such a policy would force residence-hall students to move away from the groups to which they have bonded during their freshman year at the very time that FSILG members are moving into the groups to which they have bonded.

A variation on the everybody-moves theme would be the designation of a freshman residence hall with a high density of selected upperclassmen, educated to be good mentors. The virtues of the idea include easier introduction of freshman-oriented residence-based programs and guaranteed movement after the freshman year without the drawback of moving away from a four-year culture. Nevertheless, we decided not to recommend for or against a freshman residence for two reasons: first, we were composed to have the competence to consider FSILG issues, not residence-hall issues; and second, the freshman residence idea is ripe with potential for unintended consequences, and full consideration could easily consume a task force like ours entirely.

3.5 The envelope of possible futures includes financial disaster and system collapse

Sororities do not have serious membership problems, partly because Panhellenic Association rules forbid expansion unless all existing sororities are adequately populated. The fraternities and ILGs, however, do have serious membership problems, which could become much worse if membership rates were to drop to that of other schools. If imitating other schools’s rush, recruitment, and other practices and values brought MIT’s fraternity and ILG membership rate in line as well, then most of the fraternities and ILGs would fail for lack of members.

On the other hand, the envelope of possible futures includes survival for most of the existing fraternities and ILGs. We provide numbers in Appendix V; the bottom line is that membership climbs back up to a sustainable level assuming: an increase in the student body of the size currently contemplated; a realistic level of alumni giving; and possibly a small net reduction in the number of fraternities and ILGs.

We note, however, that this is an optimistic prognosis based on many assumptions: that MIT increases the size of the undergraduate population; that alumni become convinced that the system is viable and start donating money at a level that would offset a membership shortfall of two or three members per house; that tax-favored mechanisms can be put in place that encourage giving; that those who would have joined a lost house flow into the remainder of the system; that costs do not

rise substantially; and that the number of new members does not fall in proportion to the drop in members rushing. That is a lot of coin-flips that have to fall the right way.

In any case, many houses will face a financial crisis until the system comes back into balance. Several sources provide chilling detail, including the thoughtful report of the Alumni Association of the MIT Phi Kappa Sigma chapter, *A Position Paper on the Plight of The MIT Fraternities*. After a highly detailed financial analysis, they conclude that, without vigorous action, one-third of the MIT FSILGs will be lost to MIT. The report offers many cogent conclusions and sensible recommendations; it should be read carefully by anyone desirous of understanding the urgent need for action and the full spectrum of action options.

3.6 The results of the freshman-on-campus policy should be reviewed

Many objectives have been articulated for the freshman-on-campus policy, including the following:

- Enhance educational community
- Better integrate student life and learning
- Improve the introduction and connection of our students to MIT
- Develop greater integration and spirit of community across our entire system.
- Foster a mutually supportive, academically oriented environment for all our students
- Preserve the spirit of choice, variety, and supportive networking

It is not clear that all these goals have been achieved or that there is a plan for achieving them. House masters and tutors complain that FOC has had the opposite of the intended outcomes. Problems emerge because freshmen males, who have no long-term connection with the residence hall, tend toward contagious apathy with respect to participation in residence hall governance and culture. It would seem time to review objectives, determine results, and suggest a plan for bringing objectives in line with results. To be successful, any such plan must benefit both the residence halls and the FSILGs.

4 Goals of an Ideal FSILG System

MIT people like to think in terms of what is to be achieved and how achievement is to be measured, especially when action consumes attention, time, energy, and money. Accordingly, we list in this section our thoughts on goals, metrics, and how well the MIT FSILGs are currently performing, with the caveat that we do not claim our list is, in MIT vernacular, either mutually exclusive or collectively exhaustive.

We stress that we write here of the goals of an ideal FSILG *system*, noting that chapters without houses will contribute in ways different from those of chapters with houses, and fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups will differ usefully from one another along many dimensions.

4.1 An ideal FSILG is a living and learning laboratory

An arriving freshman has spent most of life as a dependent child. A departing senior will spend the rest of life as an independent adult. In the intervening four years, the living environment helps shape the future by helping each individual to develop values, appetites, and abilities.

Values should be manifested, for example, through a celebration of gender, religious, racial, and economic diversity; through service to individuals, community, nation, and world; and through honesty in public affairs. National and local fraternities and sororities and local ILGs commonly

consider the development of such values to be a central goal, and in an ideal FSILG system, the individual FSILGs take the value-development goal seriously.

Julius Stratton, fifteenth President of MIT emphasized that MIT also has a role in value development in his inaugural address in 1959:

As a great educational institution, we shall fall short of our mission if we fail to inspire in our students a concern for things of the spirit as well as the mind. By precept and by example, we must convey to them a respect for moral values, a sense of the duties of citizenship, a feeling for taste and style and the capacity to recognize and enjoy the first-rate.

Developing character is, however, not enough, because our world is complex and often highly competitive. To succeed in it, and to have the maximum ability to make the world a better place, more is to be acquired and learned, such as:

- Ambition, constrained by fair play and respect for peers
- An appetite for group improvement and success, within the rules
- An appetite for helping friends and associates overcome problems and reach personal goals
- An ability to work out problems through constructive discussion.

In an ideal FSILG, such appetites and abilities are developed by individual FSILGs through a variety of means, which may include role models, informal advice, formal instruction, running a house, and group expectations with respect to participation in sports, activities, and community service.

Although the development of appropriate appetites and abilities is hard to measure, it is easily seen in the passion with which many alumni reflect on their FSILG experiences. Some alumni speak of their FSILG experiences as a kind of training camp for life. Others describe analogies between life in an FSILG and a start-up experience, drawing attention to the bonding that occurs in small groups when everyone is expending extreme effort to compete and prosper. Still others stress that the social and organizational skills learned during FSILG life have been extremely valuable throughout professional life; they note, for example, that rush develops the ability to converse with an unfamiliar person, a useful social skill and an essential skill both when recruiting employees and when seeking a new position.

4.2 An ideal FSILG system values scholarship and promotes activity

In an ideal FSILG, the members value academic excellence and create the environment needed to achieve academic excellence. They maintain quiet study hours and generally honor the hard work required to do well.

Some MIT FSILGs have scholarship chairs whose responsibilities range from organizing group study sessions to tracking the academic progress of freshman members. Others consider academic performance to be an individual responsibility, and focus on connecting members who know a subject with members who need help with that subject, making good use of matchmaking bulletin boards and the like. The preferred approach is the one that is well-matched to the overall style of the FSILG.

Some presume that FSILG members at MIT must do better than average academically, because MIT FSILGs stress scholarship; others presume they must do worse, because they do not stress scholarship. Neither is correct: the numbers indicate that at every level of subject load, the grade-point average of an average FSILG member is not statistically distinguishable from the grade-point average of other students.

Counter to expectations, however, grade-point average tends to rise slightly with subject load, so the way that students divide their time between classes and other activities does have a small effect on GPA.

On average, FSILG members take slightly smaller subject loads, spend slightly fewer hours on academics (39 hours versus 43), and put more time into athletics and attention to physical fitness (10 hours versus 6).

4.3 An ideal FSILG system develops leadership skills

University students educated during the next decade will be people of influence at a time uniquely alive with political, social, and environmental challenges. To have the greatest impact in this coming world, MIT graduates need not only highly refined technical skills but also an understanding of leadership skills, such as an ability:

- to think strategically as well as tactically
- to formulate and achieve goals
- to focus on important work
- to complete work on schedule
- to motivate and persuade
- to organize team effort
- to decide and act
- to understand how other people think
- to work with people with different perspectives
- to recruit
- to run a meeting
- to deal with conflict and issues of justice
- to be part of something larger than one's self
- to develop leaders for the next generation
- to establish values
- to take responsibility

There are many opportunities to learn such skills in MIT's FSILGs because a large fraction of the members at each point in time are in leadership positions in which such abilities can be seriously practiced and developed. At MIT, nearly all FSILGs have at least a president, house manager, new-member educator, risk manager, rush and recruitment chair, social chair, steward, and treasurer. Most have also a vice president, athletics chair, community service chair, and scholarship chair.

In a typical fraternity or ILG, this means that a minimum of 25% of the members are practicing leadership directly, and the rest are watching and commenting, preparing themselves for their turn. All are learning about skills required in life in general and in work in particular, in an environment that, in many ways, is a small business.

Of course, there is no want of activities at MIT and the traditionally large number of activities has, in recent years, reached record levels. One might argue that the need for FSILGs in leadership development is diminished in proportion. On the other hand, few activities offer leadership practice on the same intensity level. An FSILG treasurer is responsible for a budget of \$100,000–\$200,000; an FSILG house manager is responsible for real estate worth millions; FSILG rush chair must develop a comprehensive recruiting program, and help motivate members to work hard on recruiting; and FSILG presidents, social chairs, and risk managers control the fate of not only their FSILG but the entire FSILG system.

4.4 An ideal FSILG system discourages illegal and dangerous behaviors

Taking risks and testing boundaries are integral parts of the maturation process. Many of the lessons learned from taking risks—personal responsibility, decisive decision making, and the pursuit of ambitious dreams—are taught through the independent living experience. Thus, an ideal FSILG system channels risk taking into socially applauded areas; it also channels risk taking away from illegal and dangerous risk taking.

Unfortunately, dangerous risk taking is a problem at MIT in general, in the FSILGs, and especially in many of the fraternities. Some students claim they are not be aware of the rules about drinking in FSILGs. Others feel entitled to an environment free from any restrictions on drinking. Still others feel emboldened by insufficient enforcement mechanisms. The net result is that many FSILGs members can and do engage in risky drinking behavior, facing few, if any consequences.

Also, short of risky drinking, there is the matter of illegal drinking. Because the legal drinking age was raised to 21 to discourage drinking and driving, only seniors, for the most part, can drink legally. Illegal drinking is grounds for terminating lodging licenses by city licensing boards.

MIT's administration and many students have worked hard to address the drinking issue. Establishing an Associate Dean for Community Development and Substance Abuse Programs has had a distinctly positive impact, and the IFC has taken a positive step aimed at requiring local chapters to follow national fraternity risk-management policies. We believe the energy of the AILG also can be of considerable help and urge them to find a way to become active.

To be clear, the task is not to create more rules; the task is to create effective enforcement aimed at ensuring compliance with existing rules. By analogy, the task is not to establish a new speed limit. The task is to place patrol cars on the roads to encourage drivers to comply with the rules and fairly penalize those who do not. The goal is not quixotic; we do not expect to eliminate all speeding everywhere, but to provide enough enforcement that the choice to speed carries a reasonable chance of negative consequence, thereby encouraging everyone to drive more safely.

We observe any changes to this aspect of the culture will require clear communication to the FSILG community, a fair and explicit system of consequences, and, ultimately the understanding and trust of students, administrators, alumni, and the surrounding community. This will be a difficult task. However, all the stakeholders must realize that making immediate progress on this front is critical to the short- and long-term existence of the system.

4.5 An ideal FSILG system eases the stress imposed by a stressful environment

In an ideal FSILG, members provide each other with academic and social support, easing the stresses inherent in growing up through fellowship, not through illegal or dangerous behavior.

MIT is a stressful place, in part, because most students have to adjust to being somewhere other than at the top of their class academically. MIT has a tradition of minimizing stress by refusing to grant degrees with honors and through the pass-fail system for freshmen. MIT FSILGs have a tradition of relieving stress by providing both fellowship and a homelike environment separated from MIT's powerful academic icons.

The degree to which such stress relief is effective could be, but perhaps should not be measured. In this dimension, the goal should not be to demonstrate that one form of living experience is better or worse than another, but rather to improve the environment for everyone. It should be sufficient to observe that there are many testimonials to the FSILG impact on quality of life, enjoyment of life, and management of stress. Here is an example, from an unsolicited note from a student:

“Joining xxx was absolutely the best decision I have ever made in my life. My brothers have been the most supportive people in my life....When I was exhibiting signs of depression, it was a

brother who convinced me to seek help....For four years, it has been my brothers who have talked me through the painful moments and celebrated my successes....”

Unquestionably, not everyone needs the automatic support network that characterizes FSILG living; unquestionably, many have benefited from it in life-changing ways.

4.6 An ideal FSILG system promotes campus community and school spirit

In an ideal FSILG system, FSILG interests are aligned with the interests of the larger campus in which it is embedded. In particular, when an FSILG system is functioning well, the members feel good about themselves, their FSILG affiliation, the student body as a whole, and the university they attend. The members likewise believe that the value of the FSILG system is understood and appreciated by the university administration. From such harmony emerges a sense of community and school spirit.

At MIT, maximal contributions to community and school spirit await a rebuilding of harmony. There are, nevertheless, substantial FSILG contributions to community and school spirit when their interests are aligned with those of MIT. Such alignment occurs, for example, during new-student orientation. Well over 95% of the student orientation leaders are FSILG members for the straightforward reason that orientation leaders get to know prospective members. It is in the interest of an FSILG member to present a rising freshman with a warm welcome to MIT, thus promoting campus community at the front door.

Less measurable but equally important are contributions to school spirit. In many competing schools, major sports events fuel the development of school spirit. The Harvard–Yale game, for example, draws cheering crowds from many student generations.

How can we stimulate school spirit at MIT? We could try to generate analogs to major sports events, but we are unlikely to succeed and we do not need to try. As a student observed during one of our FSILG visits, “Everybody needs something to root for; we root for our fraternity.”

Perhaps, to paraphrase Tip O’Neill, all spirit is local. If MIT is to have school spirit, with the school bonding that follows from school spirit, perhaps it has to radiate from small groups outward. It would seem desirable, then, to think about how to promote radiation, perhaps by conceiving new ways to encourage FSILGs to combine with each other and with non-FSILG campus groups to compete or to sponsor social and community service events.

4.7 An ideal FSILG system helps make a campus inviting to prospective students

These days, MIT, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Stanford, and other big-name schools compete with each other for the same outstanding students. Most such schools, including MIT, host some sort of campus preview weekend in the spring to convince students admitted to other top schools as well as MIT to enter MIT in the fall. Recruiting success is measured by the yield on jointly admitted students.

As we visited FSILGs we were struck by how often members cited the MIT Campus Preview Weekend experience in an FSILG as the deciding factor in their choice to come to MIT and reject other top schools. In a typical conversation, a student would say something like: When I went to Harvard and Princeton, it didn’t seem like anyone cared whether I came or not; when I came here, people were friendly and helpful, so I decided to come to MIT, and here I am, in the FSILG I visited in CPW.

In this dimension, there are numbers to back up the impressions: students hosted by FSILGs during CPW are currently 5% more likely to choose MIT, an impressive number that thrills our admissions office.

4.8 An ideal FSILG system ensures a range of residence and affiliation choices

We all value choice, especially a choice of with whom we wish to associate. Some students are attracted to low-key family style living; some want to associate with athletes or student politicians; some want to be with all kinds of different people; some want single-gender housing; some want refined living surrounded by warm woods and classical music; some want to join with fellow computer enthusiasts or with artists; some want to speak a particular language; still others want to be where the food satisfies a palate conditioned by a particular ethnic background.

On the other hand, diversity is not without limits. It would be wrong, for example, for an FSILG to style itself directly or indirectly as encouraging of underage drinking or illegal drug use. And while FSILGs and other groups may wish to identify with specific interest areas, it would be wrong to tolerate discrimination of any kind. Fifty years ago, many national fraternities had exclusionary membership rules. Fortunately, times have changed, progress has been made, and the exclusionary membership rules are gone and statistics indicate that underrepresented minorities populate the FSILGs and residence halls in proportion to their numbers.

Many regard MIT's large number of living and association options, in excess of 40, as a feature, and mourn when an option goes extinct, as if it were a rare language and special habitat. Others do not believe in offering choices of living and association to MIT undergraduates on the ground that everyone should learn to appreciate and get along with people from backgrounds that are guaranteed to be diverse by way of randomized residence-hall assignments. We note, however, that many MIT residence halls have a distinctive character, much loved and promoted by their residents, and a freshman year in one of them is not necessarily broadening.

4.9 An ideal FSILG system develops loyal, enthusiastic alumni

Loyal, enthusiastic alumni promote their alma mater in many ways, such as by speaking with pride of their experiences, by encouraging outstanding high-school students to attend, by serving as Educational Councilors or as members of visiting committees, by helping with fund drives, by working on FSILG house corporations or helping through the Association of Independent Living Groups, and of course, by giving.

4.9.1 Continued engagement in FSILG affairs by Alumni

Loyal, enthusiastic alumni of an FSILG become engaged in many other ways that directly benefit their own chapters, the FSILG system as a whole, and indirectly, the entire community. For example, they may:

- Ensure compliance with applicable codes and laws
- Teach, tutor, monitor, mentor, and advise undergraduate chapter leadership
- Ensure long-term stability through financial and asset planning
- Correct unsafe, unhealthy, or uncomfortable aspects of the living environment
- Develop mechanisms for meaningful communication and networking with each other and with undergraduates
- Develop mechanisms that open doors to summer and regular employment
- Help to raise funds from fellow alumni
- Serve as an appeals resource for undergraduate chapter judicial processes
- Actively participate in the AILG and other alumni related activities

- Constructively engage with MIT's administration and faculty
- Actively advocate for their individual chapter and for the FSILG community at large.

At MIT, there are many alumni who spend countless hours on such activities through their house corporations or through the activities of the AILG. They do it for many reasons, such as a desire to give something back to their FSILG, the joy of remaining usefully connected with young people, and a belief that a healthy system is important to MIT, for which they have great affection.

The engagement of alumni in such work is especially important now that members live in houses for three years, not four. To deal with those aspects of FSILG life that require continuity, there is correspondingly less year-over-year organizational memory, which can be especially telling when dealing with, for example, licensing and compliance with standards. It seems natural that alumni should be enlisted to help, which in turn argues that MIT should take vigorous steps to increase volunteer alumni involvement and that alumni should have increased presence and influence in the MIT-FSILG-Alumni governance triad.

The engagement of alumni is also of prime importance if an FSILG should for any reason require what in the corporate world would be called a turn-around situation.

4.9.2 Continued Giving

Engagement is hard to quantify, measure, and track over time, so it is natural to look at alumni giving, a somewhat crass but objective measure. The numbers at MIT tend in general to indicate that people who are more involved as alumni give more as alumni, where involvement can take many forms.

In the particular case of FSILG membership, the fraction of FSILG alumni who contribute is about the same as the fraction of non-FSILG alumni. Significantly, however, FSILG alumni historically give considerably more.

4.10 An ideal FSILG system is financially robust

Strong financial health is a co-requisite to all the preceding characteristics. A house closed for financial reasons is a closed learning laboratory. In the long term, a financially healthy FSILG system is a system in which FSILGs all have sound procedures for budgeting (including capital planning and price setting), accounting, and bill collection.

4.11 In an ideal FSILG system, behavioral responsibilities are welcomed

The reputation of any association is largely determined by the salient acts of its leadership, and if it is small and selective, by the salient acts of every member. A corollary is that each FSILG is responsible for the behavior of its members and each member determines how that FSILG and the larger FSILG system is viewed both by society and by the host university. In particular, the FSILG suffers if behavioral problems occur in an FSILG house's public space or at an official FSILG function or in the unofficial activity of multiple members.

Accordingly, it is unhealthy and counterproductive for FSILG members and alumni to complain about lack of behavioral equality relative to residence halls, where disciplinary action is generally limited to those who misbehave. In a residence hall, there is no selection, hence no collective responsibility.

Consequently, it is important to understand not only what an ideal FSILG is, but also, what it is not, aiming for the positive while avoiding the negative. An ideal FSILG is not, for example, a place that encourages dangerous, immoral, or illegal behavior. It is not a place with a reputation for making trouble. It is not a place that irritates its neighbors with unreasonable noise or shabby

appearance. It is not a place that treats anyone with disrespect. It is not a place that thinks of itself as above the rules and regulations. It is not a place where low standards of safety are tolerated. And while people in the MIT system and its alumni legitimately think with pride about how MIT is unique, it is not hard to find examples of all these non-ideal characteristics in FSILGs.

At MIT there are many benefits to being part of an FSILG and the FSILG system provides many benefits to MIT. Yet much needs to be done by the stakeholders before MIT's FSILG system can be said to approach the ideal, rather than merely be unique. A good step is to accept the idea that with privilege comes responsibility, and to identify those responsibilities through the mechanism suggested in our recommended plan.

We believe that a strong alumni body can be of major help in several dimensions, including, but not limited to the responsibility dimension. We are encouraged by the recent founding of the FSILG Cooperative and in the development of the January 2004 *Treasurer 101* course, both of which were products of the AILG.

The FSILG Cooperative is a member owned and operated corporation that was organized to improve the quality and lower the cost of products and services purchased by MIT fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups. The FSILG Cooperative is separate from the AILG and MIT but is supported by both. The member houses elect a board of directors each fall. At present more than half of the houses are members and the number is growing.

Such programs have both direct value and demonstrate to students the kind of life-long benefits many alumni feel they have received. We strongly urge the AILG to engage their chapters more fully at the behavioral level as well, especially with regard to the alcohol problem previously addressed.

5 Recommended Plan

The overall purpose of this section is to lay out a set of concrete tasks that we believe will help to ensure that MIT's FSILGs will be an enviable, distinguishing feature of MIT in the twenty-first century.

We offer this plan with the caveat that it will be effective only if MIT's administration, along with students and alumni, are conspicuously committed to ensuring that the FSILG system reflects MIT's general satisfaction with nothing less than excellence. Without such commitment, economic forces, uncertainty, and rancor will likely cause steady decline of membership, deterioration of the physical plants, and erosion of alumni support, leading to eventual disbanding of most of the FSILGs, with the rest looking more like social clubs and less like living-and-learning laboratories.

Thus, we believe that a fundamental decision is to be made at a level higher than that of adopting this plan: The FSILG system must be embraced with enthusiasm or shut down; mere toleration is not a viable option.

Task 1: Improve Communication

Like money and space, there can never be too much communication, but we believe that the next few years call for unusually proactive communication directly from and to MIT's highest decision makers.

Task 1.1: Open up the MIT decision-making process

In our study of the FSILG system, we have found frequent examples of inadequate communication in connection with major decisions. Among many possible remedies, the following come vigorously to mind:

- Hold hearings attended by the decision makers in anticipation of changes in policy that impact the FSILGs, such as changes in rush times and rules.
- Post frequently-asked-questions lists maintained at the presidential level on matters that impact the FSILGs, such as MIT's plans for future residence-hall construction.

Task 1.2: Identify and exploit opportunities to express positive views

President Vest has said repeatedly and with great sincerity that he values the FSILGs. We propose that he, and MIT's next president, further demonstrate support via mechanisms that would be particularly well received by and helpful to the FSILGs, such as:

- Establishing a tradition of a few remarks by MIT's President at IFC, LGC, and Panhellenic rush kickoff meetings.
- Finding ways to inform the faculty and staff about FSILG benefits, especially freshmen advisors.
- Directing MIT leadership to prepare "FSILG impact statements" for major decisions involving orientation, construction, residence halls, and dining policy.

Task 1.3: Reassure the Alumni the MIT supports the FSILG system

Many alumni would like to contribute major sums to the benefit of the FSILG system but remain skeptical of MIT's motives. They are naturally hesitant to give unless they are assured, for example, that MIT understands the value of the FSILG system, that MIT puts high value on policies, recommended in this report, that ensure successful rush and recruitment, and that MIT will not put in place a system of policies or subsidies that are tilted against the FSILG system.

Rationale for Task 1

There is today a pervasive feeling in the FSILG community that major decisions are made without opportunities for those affected to be heard by the decision makers or even to know who makes the decisions.

We understand that there are good reasons why problems have to be worked out in private. One is that it is difficult to try out new ideas in the presence of constituencies overeager to presume every wild, out-of-the-box idea is on a fast track to policy. On the other hand, decision makers should realize that decisions preceded by discussion and accompanied by answered questions are better, more digestible decisions. In the absence of answered questions, false reasons, often exotic, will be conceived by creative and imaginative people of the sort that populate MIT.

Another reason for improving communication proactively, through mechanisms that answer questions publicly, is that during these hair-trigger days, an ill-considered offhand remark in any forum about discontinuing FSILG subsidies or dropping FSILGs from long-range construction planning can have a broad reach and a highly corrosive effect.

Likewise, a few remarks delivered at the right place can be particularly effective, particularly if those demonstrations have a soothing effect on parents who are misinformed about the effect of FSILG membership on academic performance or underinformed about the educational benefits of FSILG membership outlined in Section 4.

Another positive step toward better communication, already accomplished, is the appointment of a Director of FSILG Alumni Relations who reports to the Dean for Student Life and to the Executive Vice President of the Alumni Association. This appointment, of Bob Ferrara, was made in recognition of the need to start immediately on an important aspect of Task 5 of our plan. We

applaud the appointment and anticipate that the demonstrated desire for better communication will be well received by FSILG alumni.

Task 2: Improve financial health and establish quality-of-life standards

During the past decade or so, a combination of factors have led to difficult financial stresses on most FSILGs. These stresses have encouraged many residential FSILGs to reduce or eliminate long-standing expenditures on meal-preparation and cleaning help, to have members undertake repairs that should be left to professionals, or to defer maintenance work altogether.

We are concerned, in part, because we want to be sure that all MIT residences meet high standards of safety. Financial pressures can explain, but not excuse unsafe conditions. Accordingly, MIT should not only help with financial stress, but also ensure that unsafe conditions are identified and corrected.

Task 2.1: Provide additional transition support

The financial transition support of the past three years was designed to sustain the FSILGs as they adjusted their recruiting practices. The Financial Transition Program (FTP) was designed through a process that included an intention that the FSILG Community would participate in the planning and an expectation that the FSILGs would act vigorously to make the transition successful. Going forward, more financial transition support, more inclusive participation, and more intense action all are needed.

We believe that current conditions will produce a combined net operating loss among our FSILGs between one half to one million dollars per year over the next three to five years. That shortfall can be reduced or met through an extension of the FTP, savings realized through membership in the FSILG Co-op, improved financial management and coordination between alumni and undergraduates, use of the IRDF Grants Program, increases in house bills, and increased alumni gifts.

Just as the previous FTP had specific operational objectives, an extended program should ensure financial stability as improved management, budgeting, coordination, procurement, and fund raising programs are implemented throughout the system. It should also ensure that all chapter fixed costs are included in any FTP-proposed funding formulas.

Previous FTP funding was committed in the expectation of accountability, and we recommend extending the program in this spirit, because successful use of the additional support will surely require the joint effort of MIT's administration, students, and alumni.

We do not intend that FTP support should be used as a routine disciplinary mechanism, however. Transition support should be viewed as a life-sustaining lifeline for organizations that, in many cases, have served MIT well for 100 years. In connection with minor infractions, withholding transition support may have the unintended consequence of exacerbating the financial source of a surface problem. Thus, the use of transition support as a disciplinary mechanism should be reserved for infractions that put the entire FSILG system in danger, such as alcohol or substance abuse on a level that raises questions about chapter closing or suspension.

Task 2.2: Facilitate alumni giving beneficial to the FSILG system

Complex tax laws govern whether donations intended to benefit FSILGs meet conditions that enable tax deduction. MIT should help ensure that those conditions can be met, so that alumni can help to support operating costs, maintenance, capital-improvement, and endowment.

Details vary considerably from house to house, but the operating budget of a typical FSILG currently is on the order of \$150,000 year. Adding other costs brings the total to something like

\$300,000 year. Thus, annual giving at the rate of \$100,000 year or an equivalent one-time donation would offset a one-third drop in membership.

We do not intend that access to such giving should be used as a routine disciplinary mechanism for the same reasons, and with the same exceptions, that we have discussed in connection with transition support.

Task 2.3: Increase house bills and keep the playing field level

Financial comparisons are complicated by fear, perception, and differences in how students pay for food. At the moment, the average price for an FSILG is \$5800/year. For all but one house (Fenway) this price includes five dinners/week and sometimes more; for about half the houses it also includes some combination of lunch, breakfast, and an open pantry system allowing students to prepare their own meals from common supplies.

MIT residence halls do not require meal plans so it is not possible to say with certainty what residence-hall students spend on food. Accordingly, we rely on estimates from the MIT financial aid office, which assumes that students spend \$4,900/year on room and \$4,200/year for food, seven days/week. To compare these numbers with those for the average FSILG, we adjust the \$4,200/year number by taking out that portion that covers meals the FSILGs do not serve. First, we multiply \$4,200 by 5/7, because FSILGs provide meals five days/week, which yields a five-day cost of \$3,500/year. We attribute half of this to dinner (\$1,750) and half to breakfast, lunch, and snacks (\$1,750). Because approximately half the houses offer only dinner, we multiply the breakfast, lunch, and snack number by 1/2, obtaining \$875. This suggests an adjusted average room and board cost for residence-hall students of \$4,900/year + \$1,750/year + \$875/year = \$7,525/year, which is significantly higher than the current average FSILG cost of \$5,800/year.

Communicating these numbers to potential members can be complicated because FSILGs fear that an incoming freshman is likely to compare an apple and a bed against just the bed, and see the residences halls as on the order of \$1,000 less expensive. Moreover FSILGs worry that house bill comparisons may affect the thinking of prospective new members. The result is extreme reluctance of the FSILGs to raise house bills.

On the MIT side of the equation, part of the capital and programming expenses of the residence halls historically have been borne by general revenue. Starting in 2004 the housing system will bring all capital, operational, and programming costs for the residence-halls in line with fees through a plan that raises fees gradually over the next several years rather than abruptly. Less-than market-rate internal interest on capital now is balanced by greater than market-rate internal interest downstream, so there is no net subsidy when integrated over time. Meanwhile, however, MIT is undercharging for residence hall living.

We conclude that the FSILGs will be able to handle their capital, operational, and programming costs if and only if all of the following occur:

- MIT continues financial transition support
- MIT transition support recognizes residence-hall subsidies
- FSILGs raise housebills (except for those that have in recent years already)

Simultaneously, much should be done to improve the financial management of many FSILGs, such as the following:

- Take advantage of the “Treasurer 101” course developed by the AILG
- Develop long-term capital plans
- Include depreciation costs in budgets
- Improve communication between alumni and students on financial matters

- Purchase cooperatively to benefit from lower prices
- Adopt billing practices that ensure timely bill collection and processing

We also conclude that over the long term, MIT should not adopt policies that subsidize one part of the residence system, and not the others, in a way that would be disadvantageous to the FSILGs, nor should MIT adopt policies that put the FSILGs at a disadvantage. One such policy would be a requirement for all students in residence halls, including freshmen members of FSILGs, to purchase a non-refundable meal plan. Many universities have such a policy because it leads to economy of scale, but the unfortunate consequence at MIT would be that freshmen who wish to take meals in their FSILG would have to pay twice, which would discourage them from eating in their FSILG and benefiting from, for example, after dinner joint-study and tutoring programs.

Task 2.4: Consider the beneficial impact of an increase in class size

Should MIT increase the freshman class size by 10%, a matter under consideration, the potential impact on fraternities would be an increase of on the order of 3.3 residents per house (100 new students, 60% males, 50% membership, 3 years of residence, 27 fraternities). This would have a highly beneficial effect, particularly if it were to happen soon, assuming that membership rates remain steady as the class size increases.

Task 2.5: Institute a system of standards and inspections, and help with compliance

Boston, Brookline, and Cambridge all have standards for safety, with associated inspections. These should be reviewed, for the benefit of students and the peace-of-mind of parents, to ensure that they adequately cover, for example:

- Fire safety
- Food preparation and handling
- Overall building condition
- Personal injury hazards
- Building security.

MIT's administration, representative house presidents, house managers and stewards, house corporations, and the AILG should work together to identify whether additional standards are needed and to identify mechanisms by which MIT could assist in compliance in the FSILGs. They should also address the full spectrum of near-term and long-term facilities management challenges, including financial, physical, and operational challenges. The group might also identify, for example, what experience should be captured in written materials, what training programs should be developed, and what expansion of the FSILG Cooperative, if any, would be most effective. Also, some sororities have indicated a desire to shift facilities-management responsibilities from themselves to a partnership with MIT, and over time, some fraternities and ILGs might discover similar interests. Implementation of such a shift would require careful management, of course, lest the shift go so far that an important educational opportunity is lost.

Task 2.6: Institute a standard for risk management compliance

In addition to improving the safety of the FSILG system's physical structures, MIT's administrators, undergraduates, and the AILG must work together to further improve risk management practices

and to further contain illegal and risky drinking. While tackling this issue may require each party to consider potential courses of action that are unfamiliar or contrary to longstanding tradition, we cannot overstate the importance of making more progress. Maintaining the status quo is not an option.

More specifically, these groups must collaborate to develop a trusted process that ensures that behavior reflects agreed-upon risk management policies. FSILG members must come to expect that risk management rules are reasonable and appropriate, that they are in effect and enforced at all times, and that punishments are appropriate to the offense and surrounding circumstances.

Rationale for Task 2

The financial stresses on the FSILG system are consequences of factors that include:

- Membership pressures consequent to the implementation of the FOC policy and simultaneous experiments in rush and in year-round recruiting practice
- Membership pressures on fraternities consequent to the shift in MIT's gender mix toward a balance between male and female students

In addition, there are a variety of financial asymmetries with respect to the residence halls. One major example is that FSILGs pay property taxes.

A major step in the right direction, which we especially applaud, is the joint effort between MIT and the Association of Independent Living Groups which led to the creation of the FSILG Cooperative, Inc., directed by Chris Rezek. This cooperative helps its members obtain favorable prices on goods from food to flowers and services from contracting to car rental. The creation of the FSILG Cooperative is a fine example of what can be done when MIT, the AILG, and FSILGs work together.

Much more needs to be done, however, to ensure a successful transition of the FSILG system into a stable, healthy financial condition. Over time, market forces will determine which FSILGs prosper and which do not and in any transition period the unintended consequences of well-intended experiments can lead to market forces that are misaligned with MIT's goals for the FSILG system. We should not think that the transition is over until we are sure that the rush and year-round recruiting system is stable and that we have done what can be done to arrange market forces so as not to gratuitously put our most desired living-and-learning environments at a disadvantage.

Task 3: Facilitate rush and recruiting

In any complex social system, not all desires can be honored simultaneously, so it is especially important to be sure that the desired do not block the essential. Membership is the sine qua non of FSILG existence, and statistical evidence indicates that early, face-to-face access to prospective members is a prerequisite to successful rush and recruiting. Denying such access would be a bankruptcy sentence to many FSILGs.

Task 3.1: Include recruitment and residence visits in the pre-class calendar

A period of recruitment, to include both FSILGs and residence halls, should be built into the pre-class calendar. This period, to commence only after housing assignments are complete, must allow adequate time for house visits, but must not interfere with other orientation objectives.

The pre-class calendar should include a general introduction to the nature and benefits of the FSILG option for parents, with a question and answer session, so that they can be involved in the process.

So as to ensure that joining decisions are not made without some reflection and to lessen the potential for early feelings of rejection, no bids should be offered to freshmen during this pre-class period (there would be no restriction on bids to anyone beyond the freshman year).

Task 3.2: Encourage and fund additional recruitment activities

As a complement to, but not a replacement of pre-class recruitment, MIT should encourage and fund other recruitment initiatives designed to ensure a full understanding of FSILG options to prospective members.

Task 3.3: Encourage alumni involvement

Alumni can do a great deal to help with rush and recruitment. Alumni who serve as MIT Educational Councilors can add the FSILG system to the list of features they talk about with potential students, stressing, for example, leadership development opportunities. Alumni are often among the most effective rushers for their own houses once rush activities begin, partly because their presence demonstrates the continuing affection and multiclass networking associated with FSILG membership. Also, alumni can help undergraduates reach conclusions about the special values their chapter offers, and alumni can help undergraduates convey those values to potential members.

Task 3.4: Require that recruitment be conducted safely and lawfully

All pre-class recruiting, in both FSILGs and residence halls, must be free of alcohol and all substance-abuse laws must be scrupulously honored.

Violations should result in appropriate discipline, up to and including suspension of rush and recruiting privileges for repeated violations or for violations that put the entire FSILG system in danger, or are otherwise on a level that meet the standard set forth in Section 2.1 above for suspension of FTP funding.

Task 3.5: Minimize disappointments and hurt feelings connected with residence selection

Each FSILG should be required to have a referral chair, responsible for ensuring that candidates not destined to receive an invitation to join are graciously referred to better-fitting options.

Both the rush chair and the referral chair should be required to participate in pre-rush and recruitment training sessions aimed at understanding the human side of selection and rejection and at developing the skills required to avoid rejection through referral and mitigate rejection through responsible adult behavior. Mechanisms should be developed to help referral chairs to know where various sorts of candidates are most likely to find a good match.

Task 3.6: Allow MIT-controlled summer dialogue with students initiated by email

FSILG and residence-hall students should be allowed to initiate dialogue via email to prospective members during the summer before arrival at MIT. The exact form of this email should evolve with experience, but we suggest starting with the following:

- A reasonable number of messages from the IFC, Panhellenic Association, and Living Group Council (representing the Independent Living Groups) are forwarded via MIT to incoming students.
- The messages invite incoming students to examine the websites of the FSILGs. The websites are randomized on a per student basis so that no chapter has a uniformly favored position on the list.
- The websites may suggest further discussion via telephone or visit, if desired by the prospective members.

Task 3.7: Enable summer contact in connection with an enlarged summer orientation program

We propose an enlarged program of summer activities hosted around the country. The goal would be to accomplish several simultaneous objectives:

- Provide a head start on orientation to MIT
- Give new students a warm introduction to a welcoming community
- Harness the energy of individual alumni and alumni clubs, helping to reinforce ties to MIT.
- Bring new students, current students in both FSILGs and residence halls, and alumni together in an MIT-controlled context aimed at emphasizing information flow, including an introduction to living-group options.

Task 3.8: Give top available-slot priority in residence halls to students who have sampled an FSILG option

Some students are reluctant to try FSILG living because they think it will be hard to reverse their decision if it does not turn out the way they expected. Accordingly, MIT already gives top available-slot priority to sophomores who have tried an FSILG for one semester and wish to return to the residence hall system. We propose to extend this policy to undergraduates at any level who have tried an FSILG for one semester and wish to return because such a change would be of special benefit to the ILGs, who tend to recruit more heavily among upperclassmen than fraternities and sororities. We believed that providing this safety net would reduce, rather than increase pressure on MIT housing, because it would encourage upperclassmen to try FSILG living, from which they are unlikely to return.

Rationale for Task 3

Rush generally refers to time-concentrated events-based activities. Rush is one part of the *recruitment process*, which includes not only rush but also more extended and less structured *year-round recruitment*. We believe both rush and year-round recruitment are important parts of the total process.

Pre-class rush is important because it ensures early human contact, which the FSILGs need for the same reason MIT participates in college fairs and hosts campus-preview weekends. We have found statistical evidence that human contact is far more important and persuasive than other factors in reaching a decision to join an FSILG.

Pre-class rush is also important because freshmen, who are generally concerned about academic challenges, are much less likely to participate in rush held during the semester.

Some argue prospective members should not be inundated with telephone calls in the summer before entering MIT, or that FSILGs and prospective members should get to know one another over an extended period of time or that rush and year-round recruitment should well-separated from orientation activities, or that a rejection experience should not be part of an entering student's first-week experience at MIT.

In practice, however, we have found that there were serious consequences to moving all rush and year-round recruitment activities from the pre-class calendar to the first or second semester. At first it might seem that was a move that merely favored orientation activities at the expense of recruitment convenience; in fact, it was a move that favored orientation activities at the expense of academics and recruitment success as well as participation in sports and other activities. Both orientation and rush are important, consuming activities; neither should compete with each other or with study.

Also, without early exposure, prospective members develop habits, friendships, and complacencies that make it much harder for FSILGs to tap into latent interest once the academic year is underway.

Year-round recruitment is important because, like rush, it provides human contact, and some insist it is better than rush because it provides time for those who are slow to reach decisions to come to conclusions. Against this position, others argue that there is no single right choice, that people should learn early to be decisive, and that a wrong decision by a nonresident freshman is an error easily corrected by email.

Our view is highly pragmatic. We believe that were early, pre-class rush eliminated, year-round recruitment could not fill the void, and overall membership rates might well decline to the national average. Ten years ago, in excess of 50% of MIT's male undergraduates joined fraternities and independent living groups. Since the introduction of the FOC policy, that number has declined to about 45%. Elsewhere, the number ranges from 7%–12%. Thus, a decline to the national average would put 80% of the fraternities and independent living groups out of business.

Of course, multiple reasons can be offered for why MIT's fraternity membership rate is so high relative to national averages. One is MIT's traditional dependence on the fraternity system for housing and the pressures that derive from that dependence. Another is the perception that MIT's fraternities have a different and more attractive mission than others. We believe that early exposure to the benefits of MIT FSILG living is still another, and very substantial reason. Accordingly, we believe that year-round recruitment and an IAP rush should be supported by MIT as a companion mechanism for bringing FSILGs and candidates together, not as a replacement for pre-class rush.

Against this position, MIT's top administrators often bring up the matter of the potential for a rejection experience during a student's first week at MIT. Lacking data, we cannot report on how often rejection occurs and how serious the consequences are, but with MIT's range of options and slots going wanting, it would seem that there should be a place for just about everyone who wants a place. We note that more than 50% of the male students receive at least one bid, which is 20% in excess of the number joining.

It could be argued that learning to deal with acceptance and rejection are part of growing up, but we believe that would be a moot argument, because we believe the benefits derived from pre-class rush can be made to far outweigh the problems through a combination of member education, cooperative referral, emphasis throughout rush on finding the right fit, and separation of initial rush from bidding by a week. We are also much encouraged by the energy the IFC leadership has devoted to understanding and dealing with the problem, detailed in their report, *Report on Rejection and IFC Recruitment*.

We also support some form of controlled summer contact because a typical freshman does not become interested in the FSILG system until the characteristics of the MIT system are understood. We suggest email and alumni events as examples of controlled and unobtrusive summer contact.

Another form of contact is the traditional launch of joint, bundled, or separately mailed paper-based brochures. In the absence of hard data about effectiveness and problem creation, we are unsure about how these should be limited. On one hand, there seems little harm in offering information; on the other hand, competitive pressures can lead to unreasonably high cost and energy consumption.

If paper-based brochures are mailed, we recommend that all prospective candidates should receive separate IFC and LGC brochures in which each house has a contribution, presuming that such mailings are desired by the IFC and LGC. All women students should receive a Panhellenic Association brochure, again if such mailings are desired by the Panhellenic Association. We note that separate mailings are especially important to the ILGs because a student not at all interested in fraternities or sororities might easily overlook the ILG option were it described in a mailing mostly devoted to fraternity or fraternity and sorority options.

There could, of course, be an opt-in or opt-out mechanism for any form of communication. We note, however, that the typical student's initial expectation of disinterest has much to say about opt-in and opt-out postcards as mechanisms for indicating a willingness to receive information. In particular, an opt-in card mechanism requires two hurdles to be leapt: first, the busy admitted student must notice the card, think things over, and get to the mailbox; second, the admitted student has to overcome initial biases, formed in the absence of information, to request information. Hence, if there is to be an opting mechanism connected with information, it should be opt out, not opt in.

We note that FSILG-organized rush parties fall outside our definition of controlled summer contact. Such parties have tended to be a problem-generating high-cost approach to contact goals that can be achieved in other ways.

Another form of summer contact that invites at least experiment is contact with parents. Parents naturally have concerns about all forms of campus residence, and three tasteful letters, one each from the IFC, the Panhellenic Association, and the LGC, might be helpful in correcting misimpressions about the FSILG system, and not add noticeably to the quantity of mail they already receive from MIT. We recommend three, rather than one, for the same reason students should receive separate email from each of the three parts of the FSILG system.

We also note that having fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups all participate in pre-class recruitment activities is of special benefits to the ILGs. Four of the five are co-ed, and therefore compete not only with each other but with fraternities, sororities, and residence halls. WILG, the Women's Independent Living Group, competes with the ILGs, the sororities, and residence halls. Because the ILGs feel they compete, in part, with fraternities, they have to rush at the same time as fraternities. Because WILG competes, in part, with ILGs, they have to rush at the same time as the ILGs. But then, WILG candidates often express a desire to defer membership decisions until they get a taste of sorority rush, now held during January, which means they make membership decisions when the WILG interaction is a distant memory. Accordingly, we urge the sororities to participate at some level in pre-class rush immediately, and over the longer term, keep open the option of aligning all three rush calendars.

Overall, we propose mechanisms that recognize the concerns of those who prefer to delay or minimize recruitment activities, while realizing that such delay or minimization is a burden the system cannot bear.

Task 4: Jointly Determine Roles, Standards, and Expectations

MIT should bring together during the fall of 2004 representatives of all FSILG stakeholders—students, house corporations, alumni, and responsible MIT administrators—to work out and agree to roles, standards, and expectations.

Rationale for Task 4

We believe a great deal of energy is lost because various FSILG stakeholders feel disenfranchised. Also, when roles, standards, and expectations are imposed from outside, rather than arrived at through discussion and debate, energy tends to flow toward complaint rather than action.

Thus, we believe it is time to bring together representatives from the Inter-Fraternity Council, the Panhellenic Association, the Living Group Council, the house corporations, and the AILG to hammer out agreement on issues such as the following:

- What is the mission statement of the MIT FSILG system?
- What rules of behavior need to be added or dropped, and who is responsible for monitoring compliance?
- What rights should FSILG organizations and members have and under what conditions would they forfeit those rights?
- What values should be promoted by the FSILG system and through what means?
- What new educational and career-enhancing benefits can FSILGs offer and how can those benefits be realized?
- What new or neglected work needs to be done, and who is responsible for getting it done?
- What new FSILG alumni reunion programs, such as an FSILG homecoming, would be helpful.
- What specific responsibilities should be assumed by house corporations, by the AILG, and by other alumni?
- What new policies would reduce risky behavior, and what existing policies are ineffectual?
- What should be the goals of the Resident Advisor (RA) program? How can RAs become more effective?
- What aspects of FSILG activity can and should be reengineered to reduce gratuitous work and effort?
- What petitions should be set before the top MIT administration?

Also, the stakeholders should address the decision-making process and suggest policies to the administration that identify what decisions should be made by whom in light of such issues as confidentiality, urgency, and scope. Such policies should aim to improve predictability, transparency, and accountability.

Once the stakeholders demonstrate they can make progress together, a natural conclusion would be that they should come together periodically and officially to review the state of the FSILG system and consider new issues.

Task 5: Actively manage the transition

We believe the transition is not over and the FSILG system will need three to five years additional years to come back into something like a stable state. No one could have predicted the unintended consequences of past action and no one can predict the unintended consequences of the actions taken now.

Task 5.1: Appoint a temporary transition manager with a broad portfolio

The responsibilities of the transition manager would focus on transition problems and opportunities, not on day-to-day management, which is in the hands of the Assistant Dean and Director, FSILGs, and the staff of the FSILG office.

The transition manager would work with and advocate for students, house corporations, and alumni, all of whom the transition manager would view as constituents. The transition manager

would work with the Office of the Dean for Student life, the FSILG office, the Alumni Association (especially the Director of FSILG Alumni Relations), the FSILG Cooperative, the management of the residence halls, and other parties with interests and responsibilities that intersect with the FSILG system. The transition manager would have access and influence at the highest levels of the MIT administration.

Specific responsibilities of the transition manager would include, for example, the development and implementation of strategies aimed at the following:

- Encouragement of alumni giving
- Engagement of alumni in support of FSILG management and education
- Safety and security standards and inspections
- Improvement in FSILG amenities
- Increasing the sensitivity of the administration to FSILG concerns
- Improvement of relations with the communities in which the FSILGs are embedded
- Help houses that cannot be sustained to change, merge, disband, or unhouse themselves.

Task 5.2: Form a temporary transition advisory board

Because the FSILG system is complex, we believe the transition manager should be assisted and advised by a transition advisory board populated by people with a great deal of MIT experience, a positive attitude, and a demonstrated commitment to the FSILG system. Some of the members of our FSILG task force would be candidates for such a transition advisory board.

The transition advisory board would meet approximately monthly with the transition manager to review progress and offer advice. The transition advisory board would meet each semester with the President of MIT or that person who reports to the President on matters of student life.

Rationale for Task 5

Andy Grove, Chairman of Intel, in his book *Only the Paranoid Survive*, writes about volatile, unstable periods in business. He argues that these periods, which he labels times of 10X change, have to be managed through, with the continuous attention of a company's best managers, because no one can accurately predict the future during times of 10X change. Without such management, mighty companies can be left in ruins. The computer industry offers persuasive examples.

We believe the FSILG system is in the middle of such a period now, and accordingly, special, but temporary management is called for.

Task 6: Include FSILGs in Long-term Campus Housing Plan

MIT should develop a plan for building FSILG housing on campus. Likely candidates for such housing should be identified and continuously engaged in the planning process so as to ensure that plans are and remain congruent with desires and expectations.

At the same time, it should be understood that migration of a substantial part of the FSILG system to campus is impractical. Accordingly, all stakeholders should work hard to have good relations with the communities in which the FSILGs are embedded.

Rationale for Task 6

There are several reasons why an FSILG might welcome the construction of on-campus FSILG housing. For example, two sororities do not have houses at all. For the rest of the FSILGs, much has been said about the changes in the communities in which many of the FSILGs are located, particularly Back Bay, which is said to have become less welcoming as it becomes increasingly gentrified.

At the same time, there are FSILGs highly hostile to the idea of a move to campus. Many members speak of the need to put some pressure-relieving distance between themselves and MIT for part of the day. Some FSILGs have such attractive houses, moving is truly out of the question in the foreseeable future.

All this is complicated because the question is not “Do you want to move to campus,” but rather, “Under what circumstances would you want to move to campus.” Some FSILGs might be eager to move, but not to a wing of a residence hall, with all food and maintenance services provided by MIT. Some FSILGs might be reluctant to move, but might take an interest in a cluster of free standing, independently managed, variously designed houses. Some might warm to the idea over time and as plans emerge; others might cool.

Although much is murky, the following seems clear, nevertheless: there are some FSILGs passionately interested in on-campus FSILG construction; there are some that are and will remain indefinitely indifferent; and there is not enough space to provide on-campus housing for a substantial fraction of the system.

6 Epilog

MIT’s administration, in eager support of the FSILGs, has already acted on many of our developing recommendations before this report was completed and released. All stakeholders should be pleased and stimulated by adjustments made to the rush schedule in 2004, enabling help with the FSILG Cooperative, the appointment of a Director of FSILG Alumni Relations, efforts to enable tax-advantaged alumni giving, President Vest’s scheduled remarks at the 2004 rush kickoff meeting, and intense interest throughout MIT’s top administration in the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this report. With enthusiastic action on our recommended plan by MIT’s administration, complemented by equally positive, energetic action by FSILG members and alumni, we have no doubt that the FSILG system’s problems will be solved, enabling that system to continue to be of great service to its members and to MIT.