Unified Proposal for the MIT Residence System

MIT Strategic Advisory Committee to the Chancellor

In conjunction with: the Undergraduate Association of MIT
MIT Dormitory Council ❉ MIT Interfraternity Council

Draft Summary of Recommendations, October 1, 1999

Note: The Strategic Advisory Committee is using a transparent, community-based process to develop this proposal. We invite you to review our work to date, and provide suggestions to us, whether you are a student, faculty, staff or alum. Please visit our web site at http://web.mit.edu/advise/.

---

1. Objectives of the Residence System

We recognize three major objectives of the residential system.

1. *Provision of Housing*. On the most fundamental level, MIT must provide housing for its students. This housing must be safe, clean, and affordable.
2. *Provision of Home.* The residence system must support its students psychologically. Students must be able to find the close friendships that will support them during their stay at the Institute and beyond. On a larger scale, they must find residential communities that support their well-being.
3. *Provision of Community.* We support the recommendations of the Task Force and the Clay Committee in that the residence system needs to be a pillar in MIT's efforts to encourage community interaction and provide informal but invaluable educational experiences.

2. Community Interaction and Student Support

1. Faculty and staff must recognize the value of participating in the residence system, and ensure that students have enough time to do so. Consequently, existing academic regulations must be rigorously enforced, and departments should carefully consider the content and instruction quality of their subjects to ensure that students are not doing "busywork".
2. The recommendations of the Institute Dining Review should be implemented and fully funded.
3. The Faculty fellows program should be greatly expanded. $100,000 per year should be devoted to faculty-student activities.
4. Living groups should be responsible for at least one community-wide event per year, which would be funded by MIT.
5. MIT should support a "Student Development Program" which provides instruction in leadership, communications, and management skills. The program would also find internships for students wishing to build leadership skills.
6. MIT should support the creation of an informal network of peer advisors throughout the living groups.
7. Graduate Residents should receive substantial peer counseling and conflict-resolution training.
8. MIT should provide a variety of rewards and recognition for people participating in the residence system, including publicity in Technology Review.
9. As part of the tenure process, junior faculty should be able to submit recommendations testifying to their contributions to student life.

3. Capital Expenditures

We recommend completion of the following capital projects beyond those currently given in MIT's Capital Plan. These projects are staggered in three stages.

1. *To be completed (or have funding earmarked) by the summer of 2001.*

A. Renovations to reopen dining halls and create new community space: $15 MM
B. Funds to buy or rent spaces from FSILG's that might otherwise fold (retaining the spaces): $20 MM
C. Funds to renovate FSILG's: $9 MM
D. Near-term renovations to Stratton Center and Walker Memorial: $5.5 MM
E. Athletics renewal I: $8 MM
Total, Phase I: $57.5 MM

2. *To be completed by the summer of 2004.*

A. 500-bed graduate dormitory: $50 MM
B. Additional 400-bed undergraduate dormitory, needed to eliminate overcrowding and provide critical flexibility to transition to the new system: $40 MM
C. Housing Renewal and Renovation Plan, Phase 2: $6 MM
D. Renovations to East Campus: $25.5 MM
E. Renovations to Stratton Center: $2 MM
F. Athletics renewal, phase II: $8.5 MM
Total, Phase II: $132 MM

3. *To be completed by the summer of 2009.*

A. Second 500-bed graduate dormitory: $50 MM
B. Housing Renewal and Renovation Plan, Phase 3: $18.5MM
C. Walker Memorial Renovations: $31 MM
Total, Phase II: $99.5 MM
Total, all phases: $289 MM

4. Governance and Management

Successful management and governance of the residential system is vital if the new system is to fulfill its objectives. We propose several new programs and policies that will help bring about successful oversight of the residential system.

1. The MIT senior administration, administrators of ODSUE, student governments, and appropriate faculty committees and housemasters should convene a conference in the Spring of 1999. This conference shall create a general agreement that: (1) assigns the responsibilities for oversight and management of the residential system to the conference parties, and (2) defines how the parties shall communicate with each other on pending issues and resolve disputes.
2. MIT should convent a Student Life Council that would be responsible for strategic planning for the student life system, monitoring student quality of life issues, determining policy related to residence life and residence selection (in conjunction with student governments) and supervising community-wide programming. The Council would include four students, four faculty, and four administrators, including the Dean for Student Life and Undergraduate Education.
3. The Student Life Council should be responsible for monitoring the state of the residence system, and run annual surveys, focus groups, and facilities inspections to do so.
4. All senior administrators responsible for the welfare of the student life system, and in identifying and providing resources to the student life system, should be eligible to receive a bonus based on the status of the student life system (as monitored by the Student Life Council), and achievement of system goals (including those in this proposal) The bonus regularly achievable would be 10-15% of the

administrator's base salary, with greater bonuses being awarded for exceptional performance. Bonuses would be decided by committees established by the MIT Corporation.

5. Student life decision-making should be done in accordance with modern project and process management techniques.

5. Orientation and Residence Selection

We believe that these recommendations would best foster the goals of providing a supportive home for freshmen as well as providing for community interaction.

1. *Residence Hall Selection*

A. Freshmen should receive information about residence halls over the summer, and would pre-select a residence hall or theme house. They would receive a preliminary assignment over the summer.

B. During orientation, time should be set aside for freshmen to tour the residence halls (one day, plus time in the evenings). Freshmen would then confirm their summer choice of residence, or enter a lottery with a new ranking of residence halls. In this new lottery, two freshmen may staple their choices together.

C. Following this second lottery, dormitories should do internal rooming assignments by a mechanism determined by the dormitory governments and approved by the Student Life Council. During rooming assignments, entries and suites may request that particular freshmen to live with them, but may not prevent a freshman from living with them. Information about which freshmen have received positive requests shall be confidential.

2. *Orientation*

A. Freshmen should not be required to pay additional fees to participate in Pre-Orientation programs.

B. We recommend a variety of new activities during Orientation (see report for details). Primary among these are a Carnival, explorations of Boston, a joint picnic with other colleges, and sessions that will discuss student resources that every incoming student should know about. We also recommend that Parents' Weekend be moved to the start of Orientation.

3. *Theme Houses*

A. A limited number of theme houses would be a valuable addition to the MIT community. However, new houses must contribute to the diversity of the system, and must show need to be a theme house rather than a non-residential student activity. Further, theme houses should reinforce MIT's educational mission.

B. Houses should be given a choice of two options for recruiting new members:

-- Houses may recruit rising sophomores, much as independent living groups do.

-- Houses may require incoming freshmen to meet with a house leader and sign a form committing them to the house duties required for active membership.

4. *Recruitment and Selection for Independent Living Groups*

A. The Interfraternity Council, in consultation with the Residential Life Office and the Student Life Council, should set guidelines for the new member recruitment and selection process.

B. The Institute should make every effort to encourage freshmen to consider their upperclass housing options and to facilitate and support that process.

5. *Fall and Spring Residence Lotteries*

A. We encourage the idea of students living in different residences while at MIT, and that MIT should discourage the current cultural norm that students must stay in their residences except in emergency cases. However all moves must be voluntary. Further, there is no reason to restrict moves solely to rising sophomores. Any undergraduate should be able to request a move quickly and easily.

B. A dormitory lottery should be held in November of the fall term and March of the spring term. These lotteries should be mandatory for all dormitory residents, but residents should be able to choose to remain in their current house.

6. *Housing Guarantee*

Housing must be guaranteed for four years to all undergraduates. In the event of short-term population distortions due to the evolution of the FSILG system and dormitory lotteries, we recommend the following measures be taken (in order of preference):

A. Provide incentives for students to move to residences that are under utilized.

B. Crowd existing dormitory space and spread such crowding as evenly as possible between residence halls.

C. Rent non-residence hall space for undergraduates.

D. Utilize graduate student housing for undergraduates and provide subsidies for out-of-system graduate student housing for those students denied housing in those dormitories.

E. Change the dormitory lottery so that it will not guarantee that students remain in their current dormitory.

Note that D and E should only be used in case of an extreme situation. A desire by the MIT administration to save money will not count as an extreme situation.

6. *Support for Independent Living Groups*

A. Starting in June 2001, MIT should transfer funds to each FSILG equal to 25% of total house capacity times the standard housebill. This subsidy should decline to zero over six years.

B. Independent houses that are in particular financial trouble may apply for special funding.

C. MIT should support any single-sex fraternity which wishes to become coeducational. This support may include the purchase of the current chapter house from the fraternity's national organization.

D. FSILG's may choose to be listed as graduate housing options in MIT's publications for graduate students.

E. MIT should provide logistical support to FSILG's that wish to move closer to campus.

6. Special Notes

1. *Requiring Freshmen to Live in Residence Halls*

The Committee hoped to have the ability to design what would be a globally-optimal residence system. Unfortunately, we are limited from doing so by the non-relaxable constraint that freshmen not be allowed to live in independent living groups.

It may well be that the optimal residence does feature freshmen living only in residence halls. However, we cannot make that statement for certain since we did not consider any options that had freshmen living in ILG's.

2. *Graduate Students*

The Committee recognizes that this report is heavily dominated by undergraduate housing issues. As much as possible, we have tried to include graduate housing issues as referenced in existing material. Many of the community involvement programs discussed in Part 2 apply to graduate students just as much as they do to undergraduate students. Further, in Part 3 we call for the construction of two new graduate dormitories.

Nonetheless, it is clear that graduate housing must be explored in depth. We therefore concur with recommendations to have a separate community-based committee redesign the graduate housing system.

Despite this recommendation, we are adamant that the $100 million- plus in capital construction for graduate student housing be done on schedule.

To read the detailed proposal, and comment on our recommendations, visit:

http://web.mit.edu/advise