REPORT OF THE FRESHMAN HOUSING COMMITTEE

Submitted to Provost John M. Deutch

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FRESHMAN HOUSING COMMITTEE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The main recommendations of the Freshman Housing Committee and the principal reasons for them are given in this Executive Summary. The report that follows includes these sections: I. The Committee's procedure; II. A brief history of the residential system and R/O, and a description of the present system; III. The ideal goals of MIT's undergraduate residential system and of freshman orientation and the strengths and weaknesses of the present system in relation to these goals; IV. The recommendations of the Committee, the basis for the recommendations, and the problems with and questions about the recommended policies; and V. Implementation of the recommended policies. Appendix A details the Committee's procedure, Appendix B provides additional recommendations for strengthening residential life and governance, and Appendix C indicates how the recommended policies might be evaluated after implementation.

The overall purpose of the recommended policies is to assure a sound introduction to MIT, both socially and educationally; to provide strong support for the transition to the academic demands of MIT; to give students an initial experience with a diverse set of classmates (across gender, race, and culture), while providing more time for a thoughtful choice of where and with whom to live in the following three years; and to give members of each class an opportunity to know each other and develop a sense of unity. Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 constitute a single program for accomplishing these goals. Recommendation 4 concerns implementation.

1. For the freshman year, it is recommended that all students be housed on campus in dormitories.

a. Freshmen would be distributed through the dormitories, so that they would live with upperclass students. Freshmen would be preassigned to a specific dormitory, room, and (where applicable) roommate.

b. Rush for Independent Living Groups (ILGs[1]) and sororities would be deferred from the residence selection and orientation period (R/O) now at the beginning of the freshman year to the spring term, with students who join ILGs moving into them at the beginning of the sophomore year.

c. Freshmen who plan to remain on campus for the sophomore year would rank-order their choices for dormitory space throughout the dormitory system, and a lottery would resolve competing choices. The system should be designed to

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1. There are 33 Independent Living Groups in the MIT residential system, including 27 all-male fraternities, 1 all-female house, and 5 coed houses. Three are leased from or owned by MIT and the rest are independent.

encourage students to change dormitories (allowing them to move with one or several friends/roommates).

At present, what is implicitly conveyed by the R in R/O is that a freshman's most important responsibility is to find a living group which is in tune with his or her present outlook and values, in order to minimize the need for change and for accommodation to others who are different. The message perceived by some is that people and residential groups are very different and that MIT is not a single community. The residence provides a retreat among like-minded people, a place to recover from the rigors of the academic arena in which students are in competition with you and the professors are distant at best. It is to one's residential group, in consequence, that one's loyalty chiefly belongs.

This norm, which is supported by a very real community feeling in the residential unit, keeps most MIT students in the same residence throughout their four undergraduate years. This narrows their residential experience to a small subset of students who are often unrepresentative of the diversity of students at MIT, depriving students of the personal, social, and intellectual growth that would be encouraged by more extensive interaction with people different from themselves. Giving all students the experience of an initial year with a cross-section of classmates that represents the diversity of the MIT student body, before the student chooses a more permanent residence, will mean that all students will have an early experience of diversity and that most students will have the experience of living with at least two residential groups during their undergraduate years. Having all freshmen live on campus for a year may also increase class unity and identification with MIT as a whole.

Since the residential group is currently selected in a student's first few days at MIT, the basis for selection is necessarily superficial, reflecting preexisting tastes and values rather than a direct experience of MIT life and exposure to its ideals and values. By delaying ILG Rush and also the selection of a more permanent dormitory residence, students will have more time and more experience on which to base their choice. Moreover, preassignment to a dormitory room and roommate will reduce the uncertainty and anxiety associated with beginning the freshman year and will greatly simplify the logistics of moving to college, for students and their families.

Continuing the present policy of intermingling freshmen and upperclass students will preserve a major benefit of the present system, in which freshmen get formal and informal support, friendship, and advice from older students.

2. R/O would become Orientation. It is recommended that Orientation be refocused on the goals outlined in Section III of the report, which include assuring a student's well-being, security, and sense of "being in the right place," the generation of intellectual excitement, an introduction to academic opportunities and the freshman curriculum, provision of practical information about student life and co-curricular activities, an introduction to community life and norms, an introduction to the larger community beyond MIT, and orientation for parents.

Orientation at MIT is currently dominated by residential selection, an experience that is often exciting and fun but also chaotic, exhausting, and anxiety-making. With the important exception of bringing together freshmen and upperclass students (at which the present R/O excels), most of the ideal goals of freshman orientation are scanted. There is little intellectual excitement, little sense of joining a community of scholars, minimal contact with faculty, and an inadequate introduction to the curriculum of the first year and to intellectual and extracurricular opportunities. Although freshmen can choose from a large number of optional activities and meetings designed to inform and entertain them, the press of residential selection and the general level of stress and fatigue discourage individual exploration of these options. And, because students have not sorted themselves into living groups until nearly the end of orientation, there is little opportunity for activities with one's housemates.

The fact that residential selection includes rushing for ILGs and sororities (and to some extent rushing for places in dormitories) means that students begin MIT with an inherently inegalitarian experience. At a university, the relevant basis of evaluation and achievement is intellectual, not social; the ideals are democratic, not exclusionary. Without denying the value of free association of like-minded individuals in independent residential groups such as ILGs, it is nonetheless undesirable to have selection into (or exclusion from) such groups be the first significant event of an MIT education. Nor is it desirable that upperclass students should play a role in determining which freshmen are placed in a given dormitory. Having been admitted on their merits to MIT, freshmen should begin college as equals.

Preassigning all freshmen to dormitories would free attention from selecting a residence and turn it to the goals of orientation, while giving time to become acquainted with one's classmates and upperclass housemates and to have fun without the present pressure. Further, with all freshmen on campus, programs that would continue orientation during the whole of the freshman year (such as residence-based advising) would also be more feasible than at present.

3. To respond to a range of problems in the present residential system, particularly in the dormitories, it is recommended that changes in programs, in faculty involvement, and in student governance in the residential system be considered and initiated. These changes should be designed to enhance quality of life and to increase support, particularly for freshmen.

In the course of its deliberations the Committee heard of considerable dissatisfaction among some students and also staff and faculty with the quality of life in some living groups, particularly in dormitories. Although it is clear that living groups vary widely and that individuals in a living group react differently to given conditions, there were some consistent concerns. Among these were the relative paucity of systematic support for freshmen during their first year; the absence of consistent standards of general conduct, civility, and mutual respect; the unevenness and sometimes poor quality of student governance; and the poor physical quality of some residences. These problems appeared to be more acute in dormitories than in ILGs, making it imperative to address them before implementing a policy of housing all freshmen on campus. An important additional concern was common to both dormitories and ILGs: the low level of involvement of faculty in student life outside the classroom.

A systematic examination of these issues must be undertaken and changes recommended. Such changes would be of value whether or not all freshmen are housed in dormitories and therefore should be implemented without delay.

4. Recommendations for implementation.

a. Dormitory space totaling about 350 beds would be required to house the freshmen who would otherwise live in ILGs.

There are a number of ways in which the needed places in the present dormitory system could be obtained, such as the establishment of residential sororities (one of which is in prospect), an increase in the percentage of students joining ILGs in the sophomore year (as compared to the present percentage joining in the freshman year), the upgrading of underutilized dormitory space, and (during a transitional period) the provision of rent subsidies to upperclass students willing to move into private housing. In the long run, however, the Committee believes that the addition of some dormitory space, between 350 and 500 beds, will be essential to the well-being of the residential system. Even without a change in residential policy changes in the student body, the high cost of private housing, and other factors have begun to place in jeopardy the important goal of housing all undergraduates comfortably within the residential system.

b. A transition period should be planned to minimize adverse effects on the ILGs and to smooth out the shift from freshman-year to sophomore-year pledging.

If Recommendations 1 and 2 are accepted, it will be important to work with the ILGs to make as smooth a transition as possible. This might include a year or two with both freshman and sophomore pledging, thus giving freshmen the option of waiting a year to enter the ILG system. Upperclass ILG members as well as dormitory residents should be encouraged to participate in the new Orientation program, the student advisory system for the freshman year, and other programs for freshmen.

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We conclude this summary and introduction to the report with a cautionary note. In the course of its deliberations, the Committee was faced repeatedly with issues in the life of both undergraduates and faculty members at the Institute which, while of critical importance to all of us, cannot be dealt with adequately simply by making changes in the residential system or R/O. Chief among these issues is coping with the pressure of academic life at MIT: the demands on the time and energy of students and faculty, and the personal strains associated with living up to these demands. The dilemma, running through all the recent discussions of the undergraduate curriculum, is how to continue to provide an exceptional college for exceptional people while maintaining the humanity of both the students and the Institute. At present, the residential system functions for many students as a refuge from the stresses of the Institute, undermining the more positive goals for the residential system that an ideal system would promote. Although we believe that the changes we recommend will improve the quality of the educational experience of students, changes in the residential system and orientation cannot be expected to solve all the problems of undergraduate life at MIT.

I. CHARGE TO THE COMMITTEE AND COMMITTEE PROCEDURE

The Freshman Housing Committee was asked "to study the impact that R/O has on the quality of life and character of the MIT community, with special reference to the freshman class" and to "consider whether alternative policies are called for in light of their findings and, if so, to assess the pros and cons of those policies; including a policy that would require essentially all freshmen to live in Institute dormitories. Recommendations and attention to the implications as well as to issues relating to their implementation are also within the purview of this Committee." (The full charge is given in Appendix A.1.)

The Committee began meeting in late November, 1988, and held its last full meeting on May 24, 1989. We spoke with about 22 individuals in the Administration, student government, and in residence-related roles at other institutions, and in addition met with about 20 members of the Interfraternity Alumni Council. A subgroup met with some of the Housemasters. In addition, members of the Committee interviewed numerous students formally and informally and talked with colleagues about the issues. We also read a number of internal MIT reports and other material. (A list of the people who met with the Committee and the material we read is given in Appendix A.2.)

Throughout, we discussed our evolving views of the issues before us. The recommendations that emerged represent our best effort to link the ideal world defined by goals on which there was considerable agreement (see Section III) with the complex realities of MIT as a residential and educational institution built on a particular history and set of traditions. We found that the goals on which we agreed often suggested incompatible implementation strategies, leading to extended debate about the relative value of different goods and the probable consequences of different policies. In the present report we have attempted to show why, on balance, we arrived at the present recommendations. The report also gives an indication of the counterarguments that concerned us and that led some members of the Committee to favor retaining the present system in which freshmen are housed from the start in both ILGs and dormitories.

Our major recommendations were decided on at the May 24 meeting. The present report was drafted by members of the Committee in the summer of 1989 and circulated to Committee members in September for comments, prior to final revisions.

Acknowledgements. We thank the many people who took the time to meet with the Committee, as well as the much larger number of people not named in the appendix who talked individually with members about the issues or provided us with information. Our particular thanks go to Laura Mersky, the staff support for the Committee, who made all the arrangements, handled communications, provided notes of meetings, helped to edit this report, offered valuable advice, and in every way made the work of the Committee possible. We thank also Sarah Campbell, who

backed Laura up in a most helpful way. Finally, we note that Professor John G. Kassakian served on the Committee until February, 1989 (he was replaced by Professor Keyes), and Chaehoon Ko served as an undergraduate student member until March, 1989. We thank them both.

II. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RESIDENCE AND ORIENTATION SYSTEMS AT MIT AND A DESCRIPTION OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM

A. History of the residence and orientation systems

When MIT was first established in Boston in 1861, and for over 50 years thereafter, there was no official residential system: students lived at home or found their own housing. Residential fraternities were first established in 1882. When MIT moved to Cambridge in 1915, Senior House was opened to accommodate 200 students, with two of the six units designated for the use of fraternities. In 1925 East Campus was opened and all fraternities moved off campus. At that point less than 25% of MIT students were accommodated in the two dormitories, and perhaps an equal number lived in fraternities.

After the Second World War more dormitories began to be built in response to student demand and the belief that MIT would be strengthened by an enlarged dormitory system. The building of the West Tower of McCormick Hall in 1963 (with the East Tower opening in 1968) coincided with the beginning of an increase in the percentage of women undergraduates from about 6% to over 30% within two decades. At the same time, as rents became prohibitive in the Cambridge-Boston area, demand for housing in the MIT residential system accelerated even faster than dormitories could be built--and the cost of building also increased rapidly. The consequent crowding in the dormitory system led to a decision in 1986 to reduce the size of the incoming class for that year and the next.

The orientation system, prior to 1966, separated fraternity rush from freshman orientation: students who wished to participate in fraternity rush (there were no women's or coed ILGs) arrived a week earlier than the rest of the freshmen. Those freshmen who did not participate in rush were assigned dormitory rooms. Academic orientation followed for all students. In 1966 the present system in which rush and orientation are combined was introduced. The purpose was to give all freshmen a chance to consider both dormitory and ILG options. Initially the fraternities resisted this change, fearing a weakening of the fraternity system, but in fact there was no marked change in the rate of pledging.

B. The present system

The undergraduate residential system at MIT consists of 10 dormitories on or close to the main campus housing about 65% of the students, and 33 independent living groups (ILGs) in Cambridge, Boston, and Brookline housing about 30% of the students. (The remaining 5% live in private housing; with rare exceptions, all freshmen are required to live in the residential system.) The ILGs are not administered by MIT (and MIT owns or leases only three of them), but they form part of the official MIT residential system by virtue of having only MIT students as resident members, by having MIT's permission to participate in freshman residential selection, by MIT's appointment of an Advisor to Fraternities and Independent Living Groups in ODSA, and in other ways.

The 33 ILGs, which range in size from about 22 to 60 members, at present include 27 fraternities[2], 5 coed houses, and 1 all-female house. Except for McCormick Hall, which has only women students, each of the dormitories is now coed. The coed arrangements differ in the different dormitories. In some, floors or entries are single sex; in others, wings, ends of floors, or suites are single sex; and in still others, single-sex rooms are mixed on a given hall, suite, or entry.

Of the undergraduate men, about 46% live in ILGs and 50% in dormitories, whereas about 9% of the women live in ILGs and 90% in dormitories (a small percentage of students live outside the housing system). The three sororities, which also rush during R/O, are nonresidential at present (about 30% of incoming women pledge a sorority).

Freshmen join the residential system during their first week at MIT. After living temporarily in dormitory or ILG rooms when they first arrive, they make a residential choice on the basis of written information received earlier, prior visits, and three or four days of visiting during the Rush phase of R/O. Students choosing to rush ILGs or sororities attend events and meet current members of these groups beginning the afternoon of the second day of R/O and receive bids beginning on the morning of the fourth day; none can be accepted until the fifth day.

Freshmen planning to live in a dormitory visit the dormitories, which also hold Rush events, and rank-order their choices at the end of the fifth day of R/O. Most freshmen receive a dormitory assignment on the sixth day, and the rest on the seventh day. For dormitories with more first choices than there are available spaces (6 or 7 of the 10 dormitories) the Room Assignment Chairman (an undergraduate member of the student

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2. Although the term "fraternity" is sometimes used to include sororities, in this report for clarity it will be used only for all-male, nationally-chartered fraternities.

government in that dormitory or House[3]) plays a role in choosing which freshmen get in, although a random process may be used to make many of the choices. Thus, freshmen have some chance of getting into the dormitory of their choice on the basis of a random lottery, but in some cases they may have a better chance in oversubscribed dormitories if they make a favorable impression on students now in the dormitory or if they have demographic or other characteristics sought by those students.

Once the freshman has accepted an ILG bid or has been given a dormitory assignment, he or she must move promptly into that unit, but usually into a temporary room in the case of dormitories. In a second phase that takes a day or more, the freshman is assigned a specific room and roommate. This final room assignment is made on a system devised by the student government of that house and involves some choice on the part of the freshman, although the Room Assignment Chairman plays a major role in the case of dormitories.

Thus, for the first week at MIT, a student is in temporary quarters and usually has to move at least twice before settling into a permanent room. A small proportion of dormitory-bound freshmen (less than 2%) do not get a final room assignment until as late as Registration Day. A larger number of freshmen, ranging between 125 and 185 each fall over the last decade, are assigned to "crowded" quarters, rooms in which the number of students exceeds the normal number for MIT. Students can indicate a willingness to crowd on their dormitory preference card, which will increase their chances of getting into a dormitory, should it be oversubscribed. Thus, in some cases students are assigned to crowds in a preferred dormitory rather than to an uncrowded room in a less preferred dormitory, so that beds may remain unfilled in one dormitory while crowds exist in another. For many of the crowds the actual space available is not much less than is often found at other colleges. Students in crowds pay less for their rooms, and in most cases they have the opportunity to uncrowd by the second term.

Unlike many other colleges in which students move freely from dormitory to dormitory each year seeking the best room or location, at MIT the norm is to stay in the same dormitory or ILG. In addition to the binding effect of friendships, the dormitory (or ILG) is united by a student government, by intramural sports teams, by House-sponsored parties and other social events, by the Housemaster (or faculty affiliates and

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3. The term "House" is commonly used to refer to dormitories at MIT, but its use has been avoided in this report because ILGs are also called Houses and because some Houses are parts of dormitories: notably, the four language houses and Chocolate City within New House. These units are ranked separately when selecting a dormitory, so there are 15 rather than 10 dormitory choices.

alumni, in the case of ILGs) and Graduate Residents, in some cases by common dining facilities, and by traditions and stereotypes recognized both inside and outside of the House. The strong bond that most students develop with their residence (whether an ILG or a dormitory) is recognized and valued by most students. As recent alumni say, the first question asked on meeting an MIT alum is, "Where did you live?"

Although it is possible for students to drop out of an ILG and find a place in a dormitory at any time in the first year, and while it is possible for a student to change from one dormitory to another at any time (subject to the availability of an opening), only a small percentage of students (estimated to be less than 10%) do so each year. While for the most part this seems to indicate that students end up satisfied with the assignment they receive during R/O, there are reports of students who are inhibited by social pressures--or by the lower priority for room assignments that may result--from making a move that they might wish to make.

The present Residence/Orientation program begins 11 days before Registration Day for most freshmen; international students and transfer students begin orientation a few days in advance. As indicated, the first week is largely devoted to choosing a place to live and moving into it. Since one of the main mechanisms for introducing freshmen to possible residences is to give a party, this period is seen by students as exciting and fun, albeit pressured and chaotic. Some students, particularly women, report feeling left out because of the focus on ILG Rush, which is directed chiefly at men.

The three-day academic orientation begins on Wednesday of the second week (the seventh day of R/O). On the first of these days there is an academic convocation with a talk by a faculty member, students meet with their advisors, and there is an Academic Expo in which various academic departments and programs--particularly those relevant to the first year--display their wares and discuss options with individual freshmen. In addition there are a number of nonacademic events. On Thursday freshmen turn in registration materials and attend the Book Presentation and Book Night, among other activities. On Friday, Freshman Explorations offer students tours and activities designed to give them a first exposure to MIT classrooms and laboratories. Throughout, there are special meetings and events directed toward women, minority students, transfer students, international students, and other groups. There are also placement tests, an optional test to pass Phase I of the Writing Requirement, the swimming test, tours of museums, shops, restaurants, and the like. Every night there are dinners, parties, or concerts.

The last weekend provides a program for parents of freshmen consisting of a panel discussion, lunch, a boat cruise, the President's Open House on Saturday, and a bus tour on Sunday. Registration Day follows on Monday.

To understand the present R/O system at MIT, it is important to recognize the central role that upperclass students, chiefly sophomores and juniors, play. Most of the logistics and most of the events are planned and carried out almost entirely by students, although MIT staff coordinate and oversee all activities and have the primary responsibility for some of them. In particular, there is a strong faculty and administration role in Academic R/O. In large part, however, freshmen are received by and introduced into the MIT culture by fellow students. On the one hand, the firsthand contact with fellow students makes orientation less intimidating and more fun than it might otherwise be. On the other hand, the distinctly secondary role of faculty, staff, and administration means that students have only an indirect contact with the central intellectual focus and goals of the Institute.

III. THE IDEAL GOALS OF RESIDENCE AND ORIENTATION AND THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM

We set forth here the basic goals for undergraduate residential living at MIT and for the introduction of undergraduates to the Institute in the fall of their freshman year. We believe that a broad consensus exists at MIT as to these overall goals, although specific policies to implement them are more controversial. A discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the present system follows.

Goals for the Residential System

The overall goals of the undergraduate residential system are to reinforce the primary educational mission of the Institute, to support personal growth and well-being, and to encourage the development of responsible community life among diverse individuals. More specifically, the residential system should:

1. Accommodate all undergraduates who wish to be housed in the system, in facilities that meet appropriate standards of privacy, comfort, and convenience to the MIT campus. These facilities should be physically diverse and offer a variety of ways of life, giving students a wide choice. Students should have equal or equitable access to all residences.

2. Provide support for students from peers and others, both in academic work and also in social, intellectual, personal, and co-curricular life. Ideally, peer guidance should promote positive attitudes rather than an adversarial relationship towards the Institute as a whole.

3. Encourage community, including the rewards and sometimes pains that come from learning to live and work with others from varying backgrounds, both genders, and many ethnic groups. The residential system should support responsible self-governance by students, governance that respects individual differences as well as the will of the majority.

4. Support individual growth and change in way of life and friendships by permitting easy movement from one part of the residential system to another.

Goals for Freshman Orientation

The goals for freshman orientation in the fall of the first year are to engage students in the intellectual, academic, community, and extracurricular life at MIT and to inform them about the Institute and the surrounding environment. An ideal introduction should leave the student excited, engaged, knowledgeable, and above all with the feeling that he or she is "in the right place"--enthusiastically welcomed by interesting and caring people who have great expectations of the new student and who are prepared to help the student fulfill those expectations. To this end, the orientation period preceding registration should:

1. Help the student to feel personally secure, comfortable, and at home, supported by the community and the Institute. Attention to the student's special interests or concerns--as a woman, a member of a minority group, an international student, or a transfer student--is important.

2. Provide intellectual excitement and a concrete induction into the intellectual community of MIT. A substantial number of faculty members, representing every department, should be involved in this process.

3. Introduce students to the academic and other intellectual opportunities and demands at MIT and orient them to the academic curriculum of the first year, helping them to understand the choices available (including Concourse, ISP, XL, and ESG), the nature of coursework, what to expect from their faculty advisor, how to get academic help, and so on. Testing and placement are included in this process.

4. Inform students about how the Institute works and what support facilities it offers: the practical information about student life, such as where the ODSA is, how bills should be paid, what to do if one is sick, where to buy a lamp.

5. Encourage students to understand and participate in community life at MIT, not only within their own residential group but also in other interest groups and social clusters. Students should be introduced to the social and personal norms that govern life at MIT, including mutual respect between individuals of a different gender, ethnic, or religious background. Students should be given an opportunity to participate in residential governance.

6. Provide an introduction to the wealth of co-curricular activities at the Institute, ranging from sports to dramatics to music, showing how such activities can fit into one's life in a coherent and supportive way.

7. Introduce students to the larger community of which MIT is a part--Cambridge, Boston, and beyond--by indicating the

multiple possibilities offered for cultural and recreational exploration, as well as for community involvement and service.

8. Give parents of freshmen a more specific idea about MIT undergraduate life and the opportunities and stresses their child may encounter.

While meeting all these goals for orientation would be a tall order, all require some attention.

How well does MIT meet these goals? The strengths and weaknesses of the present system

The Residential System

1. Accommodating all undergraduates in the system in comfort, and giving them a diverse and equitable choice of residence lifestyles.

a. Accommodating all undergraduates: Although up to this time most undergraduates have found a place in the residential system, there are reasons for concern about whether that will be true in the future. (These concerns have been examined in detail in the 1988 report of the Independent Living Group Committee, chaired by Professor Robert S. Kennedy.) Even now, there is crowding in the dormitories, there is insufficient accommodation for transfer students, and students in ILGs cannot be guaranteed a place in the dormitory system after the first year. The number of undergraduate men from groups traditionally interested in MIT's fraternities (mostly white Americans) has decreased as the number of women and male students from ethnic and minority groups has increased, making it more difficult for fraternities to attract pledges and threatening the survival of some. While fraternities have adapted by recruiting vigorously from previously underrepresented groups such as minority students, that has not fully compensated for the demographic changes just noted. Moreover, the increasing cost of private apartments in the area means that fewer and fewer students have been willing and able to live off campus.

Not only because the ILGs provide a valid and valuable alternative to dormitory living for many students, but also in order to accommodate all students in the residential system, it has been essential for MIT to support the ILG system and ILG Rush. Whether this support (including the placing of Rush as the first major activity in R/O and the lesser emphasis on rush activities in dormitories) has biassed student choice is unclear.

b. Choice of a variety of lifestyles in residences: The residential system, including dormitories and ILGs, does provide

a wide range of choices of lifestyle in respect to gender mix, eating arrangements, single versus double rooms, extent of involvement in self-governance, available facilities, social and athletic activities, and so on. Of course, not every combination of these variables is available, and some choices such as live-in sororities or cooperative dormitories are missing. A problem is that the choice is usually made only once (see point 4 below), in the first few days a student is at MIT. Given the stress most students experience when starting college, the short time they have to learn about their options and to meet people, and their lack of any direct experience of undergraduate life, it is not clear that students can make the choice wisely.

c. Equal access: Access to residences is inequitable in several respects, in terms of gender, peer control, and economics. What de facto segregation exists among students from ethnic or racial minorities seems to be largely self-determined, but it still raises some questions.

Gender. Although few would advocate mandating coed living for everyone, the present system seems imbalanced. Eighty-five percent of the ILGs are single-gender (all but one, male), whereas all but one of the dormitories (an all-woman dorm) are coed, although a number of dormitories have single-sex entries or floors. Further, because students currently living in a given unit play the major role in granting or withholding access to students of a given gender and deciding on which rooms will be assigned to women and which to men, there is a built-in inequality of power in favor of men in most of the dormitories and ILGs, or was initially. The inequality is in favor of women in McCormick, which has decided to remain all-woman up to this point. In effect, instead of equal access for all students, "we" let "them" into "our" dormitory or ILG on our terms.

Peer control. In ILGs, and to some extent in dormitories, peer control is exercised not only over the gender of incoming residents, but also over which individuals are admitted and where they are placed. In these cases other students' opinions of the student in question (often based on superficial impressions) control access to a residence, rather than equitability.

Economics. The different dollar costs associated with different residential choices also introduce an inequitable note. In the case of dormitories, the differences, although comparatively small, accurately reflect the perceived condition, facilities, and comfort of the different dormitories. Whether the difference in costs exacerbates the stereotypes associated with different dormitories and drives the self-sorting (and self-image) of students is less clear. Nor is it clear what role financial factors play in the choice of an ILG. In one case (Student House), however, there is an explicit commitment to include only students who particularly need financial assistance.

Ethnic and racial clustering. Although several years ago there were relatively few ethnic and racial minority students in

ILGs, that situation changed when most ILGs began to recruit such freshmen actively. At the present time, the representation of ethnic and racial minority students in ILGs collectively (and also in sororities) is not markedly different from their representation in the dormitories. In the dormitories, however, some members of ethnic or racial minorities have formed residential clusters, one of which has been formally recognized (Chocolate City). The benefits of such a cluster for some students have been outlined in the first report of the Minority Student Issues Group in 1986, "The Racial Climate on the MIT Campus." Living in such a cluster also has some costs, however, among them the loss for both the minority students and the other students of residential contact between individuals from different groups.

All these inequities of access are to some extent the necessary price of freedom of association with individuals of one's choice, within one's financial means. Yet it is important to recognize the human and community cost associated with such inequities, and to work to reduce them when possible--particularly in the freshman year.

d. Comfort and convenience: Residences vary considerably on this dimension. Crowding in dormitories is a problem that has already been noted, and there are substantial variations in the facilities and the general attractiveness of dormitories (as well as ILGs). Kitchens and food service also vary. Thus, no generalization about the level of comfort can be made, although the unevenness is a cause for concern. The dormitories and the "campus" ILGs have a more convenient location in relation to MIT than other ILGs, but students sometimes value getting away from campus at the end of the day.

2. Academic, personal, and social support from peers and others: The mixing of classes in all the residences at MIT makes it possible for students to obtain support from their classmates and from upperclassmen who play an important role in counseling and advising them. Many of the ILGs, in particular, offer a highly organized support structure for their members. There is, however, some concern that student advice is too narrowly focused on coping strategies and ways of "beating the system," an adversarial approach that may interfere with the communication of the positive values we wish to convey to our students.[4]

In most of the dormitories and some of the ILGs, once R/O is over there is no systematic programming throughout the year to complement the classroom experience and to nurture the assimilation and socialization of freshmen into the overall MIT

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4. Students have pointed out that some professors and departments also have an adversarial attitude toward them at times, as when a professor is attempting to "weed out" students from an oversubscribed class.

community. Housemasters and Graduate Residents offer some support when problems arise, and in some dormitories and ILGs there are Faculty Affiliates who visit regularly, residence-based advisor groups, or House-hosted undergraduate seminars. Yet these activities and personnel do not add up to a systematic program of support and socialization by adults, to complement the informal support from peers. Lacking in particular are close encounters with faculty members, outside of the classroom.

3. Community life and self-governance in cooperation with others of different background, ethnicity, and gender: While self-governance is a strong tradition in MIT dormitories and is a central part of life in the ILGs, there are a number of concerns with the present system, particularly in the dormitories.

ILGs must govern themselves successfully to survive as organizations, and a student who joins an ILG understands this responsibility and presumably has a commitment to the group. This tends to promote an effective governance system. In contrast, survival of a dormitory as a place to live does not depend on the effectiveness and fairness of student governance. Many students choose to live in dormitories because they are not interested in participating in governance, and that is an option we should offer our students. But the consequence is that in some cases the students who do get involved lack full community support and may be seen by others as arbitrary or dictatorial. At times, majority vote in a house has governed decisions that are seen as oppressive by a minority group, most frequently women. At times, also, student governance in one or another unit has lapsed or become ineffective. Housemasters and graduate residents cope with such problems with varying success, and indeed there is disagreement about what role Housemasters and graduate residents should or could reasonably play in these matters.

As already noted, there is some measure of de facto segregation in the residential system in terms of gender and ethnicity. The gender segregation is partly a consequence of single-sex ILGs (chiefly fraternities) and partly due to the choice by women of single-sex dormitory living. Ethnic and racial clustering in dormitories is motivated in large part by the desire for support from one's group. The conditions that make such support necessary--sexist and racist attitudes and ethnic insensitivity--continue to be combated by the Administration and by students with incomplete success. In the meantime, full residential community life among students from different backgrounds is only partially realized here.

4. Individual growth and change encouraged by easy movement within the residential system: This goal is not well-supported by the current residential system, which has built-in disincentives to changing dormitories or leaving (or later joining) ILGs. ILGs expect their members to stay, and after the first year students cannot count on finding a place in a dormitory. In the other direction, ILGs rarely take in

upperclass members, other than transfer students. In the dormitories, the strong tradition that the House (or even a specific entry or floor of the house) is one's home for four years is self-reinforcing: the implicit assumption is that there is "something wrong" with a student who moves to a different section or dormitory. Other deterrents are that the student will have a low priority in the choice of rooms in the new dormitory or section of the dormitory, and that, because moving is unpopular, one's friends are unlikely to move with one. (It should be noted that moving between rooms within the relevant unit, and changing roommates, is acceptable and common.)

Freshman Orientation

1. Ensuring that freshmen feel personally secure, comfortable, and at home: The staff and the large number of student volunteers do everything they can to smooth the mechanics of R/O and keep freshmen informed and supported at every step. Yet the present residential selection system is necessarily a disrupting, insecure, and often anxiety-making process. Students start out in temporary quarters, among strangers, and must exert themselves in the first three or four days to select a group and place in which to live, with uncertain results. Then there is a move, often once more to temporary quarters, until a second uncertain process (governed by older students) assigns a permanent room and roommate. Only then can one begin to settle in, have one's possessions delivered to MIT, and get to know the people one will see most of during the year. This period of insecurity comes at what is for most students the most critical transition they have yet experienced in life: starting college.

Upperclassmen tell freshmen that the experience may be hectic, but that it is really a lot of fun and that, however chaotic, it is worthwhile because students get to choose where to live, and making such choices is a maturing experience. Most students accept this view of the process, even though as sophomores participating in Rush they come to realize that freshmen actually have less choice than they think. Nonetheless, most students believe that they are much happier in the residence they ended up in than they would have been if they had been

placed randomly, even though they may acknowledge that the information on which they based their choice was only partial.[5]

2. Intellectual excitement and an induction into the intellectual community at MIT: The present system falls short of this goal. R/O generates a lot of excitement, but very little of it is intellectual. Understandably, the entire focus of most students during the first week of R/O is on the choice of a residence and assignment to a permanent room and roommate; once that process is complete, there are still the people in the new residence to get to know, a room to furnish, and the like. Together with necessary mechanics of orientation, such as placement testing, meeting with an advisor and advance-registering, and the Writing Requirement test, these preoccupations leave little interest or energy for intellectual activities.

The faculty convocation mixes entertainment with an intellectual challenge, but Book Night is the major intellectual event of R/O. There is a public presentation in Kresge, followed by small group meetings with freshmen in their residences, led by faculty and others. This event seems to work well. Freshman Explorations offer a potentially rich exposure to laboratories, classrooms, and projects at MIT, but a large number of freshmen take little advantage of these tours and activities.

3. Introduction to academic and intellectual opportunities and the academic curriculum: Although the relevant information is provided during R/O, there is a general feeling that the focus on residence leads to less attention to this information than would be ideal. The rules and choices for satisfying the core academic requirements are bewildering, with advanced placement options, a choice of subjects to satisfy each requirement, and the several special programs (Concourse, ESG, XL, and ISP). Add to that the HASS choices, freshman seminars, and the rest, and one has a remarkably complex maze of constraints and choices to negotiate. More leisure to consider these academic choices during orientation might be helpful.

4. Practical information about student life: This information is conveyed fairly well, with the benefit of

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5. It should be noted that in most colleges students report that they like the prevailing residential system, whatever it is. That is, students seem to adapt successfully to a wide variety of systems and they then give credit to the system for their satisfaction. This bias makes it difficult to evaluate student support for an existing system, here or elsewhere. One should bear in mind that MIT had a very different system up to 1966, and it was the Administration that made the change to the present system, against considerable student resistance.

publications such as the Freshman Handbook and HowToGAMIT as well as presentations, discussions with older students, and the like.

5. Introduction to community life and norms: Although incoming students engage in a process of residential choice that is largely managed by other students, this experience does not give them a realistic idea of everyday community life in the residence. Freshmen are the target of lobbying and interviewing by upperclass students that is partly informational and partly a sales pitch, a mixture of disinterested concern and self-serving selection of desirable future colleagues. Not until after the final residence has been assigned, however, is there a chance to begin participating in the residential community. Most of the ILGs have explicit mechanisms for informing new members about what is expected of them, but in dormitories there is little chance during orientation to begin sharing standards of behavior, even about the most clear-cut rules (e.g., alcohol).

6. Introduction to extracurricular activities: The information is available in written material, in optional events, and at the Activities and Athletics Midways, but again it is overshadowed for most students by residential concerns.

7. Introduction to the larger community: A number of opportunities are offered, including some that are part of Rush itself. But once again these activities take a back seat to residential concerns and the mechanics of orientation.

8. Giving parents information and reassurance: The initial uncertainty about residence, and sometimes the outcome (e.g., crowding, or the assignment of a woman student to a coed dormitory), are unsettling for some parents. For example, there are families for whom coed living is seen as a violation of a strong cultural or religious norm. The necessity for two trips to campus if parents want to bring their son or daughter initially and also attend Parents' Weekend is a major inconvenience for some parents who live at a distance. The convocation for parents and students on the last Saturday morning is a good occasion for conveying information and answering some of the questions parents have. Whether more could or should be done on behalf of parents is unclear.

Summary of problems with the present residence and orientation systems

Changes in the student body and in the surrounding community place in jeopardy the goal of housing all undergraduates within the residential system. In particular, there is already a shortage of dormitory space, and in the future this problem is likely to become more acute.

The present pattern of de facto residential segregation of ethnic and racial groups and of women and men is exacerbated by the norm that keeps most students in the same residential group throughout their four undergraduate years. This narrowing of residential experience to a small subset of students that is often unrepresentative of the diversity of students at MIT may deprive students of the personal, social, and intellectual growth that would be encouraged by more extensive interaction with people different from themselves.

Since the residential group is selected in the first few days at MIT, the basis for selection is necessarily superficial. For the freshman, it reflects preexisting tastes and values rather than a direct experience of MIT life and an exposure to its ideals and values. The upperclass students who introduce freshmen to their residences naturally try to present them in the best light, adding to the difficulty of making an informed choice. For upperclass students who select freshmen in ILGs and to some extent in dormitories, the basis for their decisions is likewise limited.

Orientation at MIT is dominated by residential selection, an experience that is often exciting and fun but is also chaotic, exhausting, and anxiety-making. With the important exception of bringing together freshmen and upperclass students (at which the present R/O excels), few of the ideal goals of freshman orientation are fully achieved. There is little intellectual excitement, little sense of joining a community of scholars, and an inadequate introduction to the curriculum of the first year and to intellectual and extracurricular opportunities. Few faculty members participate and there are not many activities that attract their participation, apart from freshman advising.

Although freshmen can choose from a large number of optional activities and meetings designed to inform and entertain them, the press of residential selection and the general level of stress and fatigue seem to discourage individual exploration of these options. And, because students have not sorted themselves into living groups until nearly the end of the formal orientation program, there is little opportunity for participation in these activities together with one's housemates. For some, R/O can seem too long and unhelpful as a preparation for classes.

The fact that residential selection includes rushing for ILGs and sororities (and to some extent rushing for places in dormitories) means that students begin MIT with an inherently

inegalitarian experience. Every student must decide whether or not to participate in ILG Rush; even those who have decided to live in a dormitory are involved in the activities of dormitory Rush. Those who do participate are competing with each other to make a favorable impression (or even an accurate impression) on the upperclass residents, and they must necessarily try to discover where they "fit in." Necessarily, also, many fail to get a bid from one or more ILG or sorority in which they were interested, a judgment by one's peers that can be painful. More rarely, a freshman who has participated in Rush receives no bid from any ILG or sorority--and in a small percentage of those cases there is considerable distress. Worry about the possibility of rejection is not limited to those actually rejected.

At a university, the relevant basis of evaluation and achievement is intellectual, not social; the ideals are democratic, not exclusionary. Without denying the value of free association of like-minded individuals in independent residential groups such as ILGs, it is nonetheless undesirable to have the selection into such groups be the first significant event of an MIT education. Nor is it desirable that upperclass students should play a role in determining which freshmen are placed in a given dormitory. Having been admitted to MIT, freshmen should begin college as equals.

IV. THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSION OF THEIR BASIS

The overall purpose of the recommended policies is to assure a sound introduction to MIT, both socially and educationally; to provide strong support for the transition to the academic demands of MIT; to give students an initial experience with a diverse set of classmates (across gender, race, and culture), while providing more time for a thoughtful choice of where and with whom to live in the following three years; and to give members of each class an opportunity to know each other and develop a sense of unity. Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 constitute a single program for accomplishing these goals. Recommendation 4 concerns implementation.

In section IV.A the recommendations are listed and in sections IV.B and C they are discussed and amplified. This discussion is intended to show how the recommended policies would address some of the problems with the present system and bring the residential and orientation systems closer to the ideal goals outlined in Section III. The discussion brings out the arguments that the Committee found most persuasive, the problems and questions that remained, and some more detailed suggestions that should be considered if the recommendations are implemented. In section IV.B the positive reasons for adopting the recommendations are outlined, and in section IV.C some problems, questions, and counterarguments are discussed.

IV. A. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For the freshman year, it is recommended that all students be housed on campus in dormitories.

a. Freshmen would be distributed through the dormitories, so that they would live with upperclass students. Freshmen would be preassigned to a specific dormitory, room, and (where applicable) roommate.

b. Rush for Independent Living Groups (ILGs) and sororities would be deferred from the residence selection and orientation period (R/O) now at the beginning of the freshman year to the spring term, with students who join ILGs moving into them at the beginning of the sophomore year.

c. Freshmen who plan to remain on campus for the sophomore year would rank-order their choices for dormitory space throughout the dormitory system, and a lottery would resolve competing choices. The system should be designed to encourage students to change dormitories (allowing them to move with one or several friends/roommates).

2. R/O would become Orientation. It is recommended that Orientation be refocused on the goals outlined in Section III of the report, which include assuring a student's well-

being, security, and sense of "being in the right place," the generation of intellectual excitement, an introduction to academic opportunities and the freshman curriculum, provision of practical information about student life and co-curricular activities, an introduction to community life and norms, an introduction to the larger community beyond MIT, and orientation for parents.

3. To respond to a range of problems in the present residential system, particularly in the dormitories, it is recommended that changes in programs, in faculty involvement, and in student governance in the residential system be considered and initiated. These changes should be designed to enhance quality of life and to increase support, particularly for freshmen.

4. Recommendations for implementation.

a. Dormitory space totaling about 350 beds would be required to house the freshmen who would otherwise live in ILGs.

b. A transition period should be planned to minimize adverse effects on the ILGs and to smooth out the shift from freshman-year to sophomore-year pledging.

IV. B BASIS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: To house all students in dormitories for the freshman year. This policy would:

-give most students an experience of living in two different residences, frequently with quite different and complementary living styles, during their four years at MIT.

-preserve much of the present strength of the residential system, which is based on a commitment to a given living group, by highlighting the deliberate housing choice that is made at the end of the freshman year.

-make it easier to implement special residentially-based educational programs, involving faculty in significant numbers, as a shared experience for the entire freshman class.

Recommendation 1. a: To distribute freshmen through the dormitories and to preassign them to a specific dormitory, room, and (where applicable) roommate. This policy would:

-provide an initial year in which students live with a cross-section of their classmates and others rather than a self-selected group, thus giving students a chance at the outset of

their college experience to meet and form a community with a more diverse group of people than at present, and to build a sense of Institute citizenship.

-eliminate the uncertainties, logistical mess, and inherent inequities associated with residential selection in R/O.

-provide the security of knowing in advance where and with whom one would be living, making it possible to move in with a single trip by one's family and to have communication with one's roommate in the summer before freshman year.

-preserve the benefits of contact with upperclass students in the residence, as advisors and sources of support.

Recommendation 1. b: Deferring ILG and sorority Rush to the spring of the freshman year would:

-allow freshmen time to become familiar with academic, social, and co-curricular life at MIT before choosing a residence in which to spend the remaining three years.

-give students (such as some international students) who are unfamiliar with the ILG concept, or who bring to MIT inappropriate stereotypes about fraternities and sororities, time to learn about our ILG and sorority options.

-give a longer period to become acquainted with specific ILGs and their members, as well as dormitories and their residents, before deciding to join one or another group. This acquaintance could be made under more natural conditions than those of the present Rush and would assure a better-informed choice of surroundings, living style, and housemates.

-postpone the experience of selection or rejection attendant on seeking membership in an ILG or sorority until a point when the student is likely to be more secure and less vulnerable.

-postpone the additional responsibilities associated with ILG life until after the first year.

Recommendation 1. c: An open choice of housing for freshmen who decide to stay in the dormitory system for their remaining years, with a lottery to resolve competing choices. By giving all such freshmen equal access to open places across all the dormitories, by allowing small groups of students to move as a unit, or by other policies, freshmen would be encouraged to move to another dormitory, although they would not be prohibited from staying in the initial dormitory if that were the lottery's result. The intention would be to develop a new norm according to which freshmen expect to make a real residential choice toward the end of the first year. This policy would:

-lower barriers to movement between dormitories not only for freshmen, but probably also for upperclass students, encouraging

students to seek out new living environments and friendships as they grow and change.

-reduce the tendency for students to stay put for four years, a tendency which would undermine the ILGs.

-give an opportunity for current residence "personalities" to change from the negative images carried by some of them.

Recommendation 2: Orientation without Rush would:

-place the focus of orientation on an introduction to academic and extracurricular opportunities, while giving time to begin to know one's residential group, the freshman class as a whole, and the wider MIT and city environment.

-make possible a far more effective academic and extracurricular orientation, in closer accord with the purposes of an educational institution.

-continue to give upperclass students a chance to be involved in orientation without the need to "sell" a given living group or make judgments about the freshmen.

-make it easier to implement residence-based freshman advising and other residence-based programs during orientation.

-allow the orientation period to be shortened, or to be divided between an optional period (e.g., an off-campus trip) and the main orientation period.

Recommendation 3: Changes in programs and support, faculty involvement, and student governance in the residences, particularly the dormitories, would:

-provide a more appropriate environment for the freshman year, a point of special importance if all freshmen are housed in dormitories.

-provide support for making student governance more effective, responsible, and fair.

-improve the quality of life for all residents.

-ameliorate the separation of "living space" and "learning space," students from faculty, personal life from intellectual pursuits.

Recommendation 4. a: Dormitory space for 350 extra freshmen would be required which could be obtained within the present dormitory system in various ways. Planning for this transition would:

-allow Recommendation 1 to be implemented without a sudden displacement of upperclass students from the dormitory system.

-allow time to plan for the acquisition or building of new dormitory space, which would in turn:

-provide the opportunity to respond to possible changes in the proportion of students choosing to live in the ILGs, a problem outlined in the report of the Independent Living Group Review Committee (1988) that could become more acute if all freshmen were housed on campus.

-provide a chance also to address the present crowding in dormitories and the resulting exclusion of some categories of undergraduates who would like to live in the dormitories.

-give the opportunity to expand the present varieties of housing, for example by including co-op housing.

Recommendation 4. b The planning of a transition period for the ILGs and sororities would:

-smooth out the shift from freshman-year to sophomore-year pledging, possibly by providing a year or two in which students would have the option of pledging either as freshmen or as sophomores.

-provide for the participation of ILG members in orientation and the programs of the freshman year, perhaps by retaining a liaison with the dormitory in which they had previously lived.

-allow ILGs and sororities to work with the administration and dormitory groups to plan for a workable deferred Rush.

IV. C. Problems and questions

In the course of its discussions the Committee considered many arguments for maintaining the present R/O and residential systems. The major arguments and responses to them follow.

1. A substantial majority of undergraduates affirm the advantages of the present R/O system for choosing one's residence and take pride in MIT's distinctiveness, in this respect, among American universities.

Response: Surveys on campuses throughout the country generally show that students like the system they are familiar with, so it is difficult to tell whether or not students would come to like the recommended system equally well.

2. Specific reasons given in favor of the present system for residential choice include:

a. Giving incoming freshmen this major choice means that they are treated as responsible adults.

Response: The choice is often based on inadequate information and is made under the kind of pressure that does not foster a mature decision.

b. Settling the question of housing at the start of freshman year assures social stability. Entering students can begin immediately contributing to a social unit in which they have a long-term stake.

Response: Long-term social stability should be pitted against benefits of a diverse experience and a more considered choice that is made after the initial adjustment to college life. While having to move to new housing at the end of the freshman year necessarily would involve some social disruption and would require new adjustments in the sophomore year, it would also provide new friends and a chance for a new start. It would form a rite de passage to a new level of responsibility in a living group.

c. Requiring all freshmen to live in a dormitory would mean that about a third of the class would be deprived of the excellent freshman support systems now available in ILGs.

Response: This problem weighed heavily with the Committee and motivated us to make Recommendation 3 a sine qua non, to strengthen the support for freshmen who live in dormitories.

d. Immediate rush is on the whole an exciting and happy event which not only involves freshmen but also provides a strong incentive for large numbers of upperclassmen to become enthusiastically engaged in the orientation process.

Response: The fun and partying associated with the present R/O could be generated in a less pressured form in a new orientation program. While the incentives for upperclassmen to participate (and the form of their participation) would be different in a new system, they would not necessarily be reduced. Recommendation 4. b. recognizes that it would be important to build in a role for upperclassmen in ILGs as well as in dormitories.

e. The present system allows students to find a more optimal environment for their first year, with a more compatible roommate and fellow residents, than they would be likely to have under a system of random assignment.

Response: This point is valid but must be pitted against the other arguments in favor of a deferred choice. Preassignment of a roommate might take into account preferences such as for single-sex living, (non)smoking, perhaps a quiet versus noisy environment, and so on. Perhaps incoming students should rank-order their preferred choice of dormitories for the first year, as well. (Both these policies are common in other colleges.) A balance between the benefits of random assignment and of student

choice could be reached in various ways, as experience with the new system developed.

3. The ILG system, which has served MIT long and well, could be seriously damaged if all freshmen were housed on campus. ILG membership in fraternities could decline enough to force some houses to close, and life in the surviving houses could be impoverished by the absence of freshmen.[6] A further consequence would be that some alumni of the ILGs, who are among MIT's most loyal supporters, would be disaffected.

Response: This argument against the major recommendations of the Committee was the one that was of most concern to us, and for some members it was decisive. Although in principle it would be possible to compensate completely for the loss of freshmen by recruiting a larger percentage of undergraduates into the ILGs, in practice that may be neither feasible nor desirable, for it would put an even larger percentage of male undergraduates in fraternities, increasing the gender imbalance between ILGs and dormitories that already is of concern. Although painful, a reduction in the number of undergraduates in (male) fraternities would be consistent with the decrease in the number of male students in the last decade and the increase in student interest in coed living. Whether some fraternities would choose to become coed (a choice that is not at present available under most of their charters), whether some would close and be replaced by sororities or coed houses, or what other outcomes might result is uncertain. That most ILGs would survive in some form seems likely, as long as the style of life they offer continues to have its present attractions to a large proportion of undergraduates.

The absence of freshmen would mean a more rapid turnover of membership and a shorter time to develop the community spirit that is the essence of ILG life. Yet in many other colleges and universities rush is delayed for a year, so it is known that ILGs can survive and thrive in such a system.

The disaffection of some current alumni of MIT fraternities is a serious concern, but it is the belief of the Committee that if the reasons for making a change are sound and are in the interest of MIT students as a whole, if they continue to be discussed with alumni and with present ILG members, and if careful attention is given to mitigating any adverse effects on the ILGs and easing any resulting changes in the ILGs, the present members and alumni of ILGs will support MIT in this effort and remain loyal to the Institute even if they disagree with the change.

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6. Studies of fraternity membership changes after a shift from freshman to sophomore pledging have indicated that membership may drop substantially (25-33%), but in some cases such as that of Worcester Polytechnic Institute there has been little or no drop.

4. Deferring Rush until the spring of the freshman year would in reality be a protracted rush, an ongoing distraction for both the rushees and the rushers and an added expense for the ILGs.

Response: This, too, is a serious concern and would require the cooperation of the ILGs, the Dean's Office, and other students to develop a system for introducing freshmen to the ILG system and making a mutual choice, a system that would be informative and fun without being unduly protracted, distracting, or expensive.

5. Deferring Rush (as well as deferring the choice of a "permanent" dormitory) would actually increase the homogeneity of students in a given living group by allowing students more accurately to pinpoint differences among the groups and join the one he or she is most like, thus reinforcing the stereotype. In contrast, the present system has a haphazard element that works against excessive homogeneity.

Response: Perhaps this is true, but reducing the amount of information available would seem to be a poor way of achieving diversity; a positive policy of seeking diversity of membership on the part of ILGs would be more valuable. It is to be hoped that students who have had a year living with a diverse group will value that experience sufficiently to seek such diversity within the ILG or dormitory they select.

6. Assigning freshmen at random to dormitories and encouraging them to move at the end of the first year would measurably erode the sense of social wholeness and distinctive style which the dormitories now prize.

Response: This is certainly a concern, although it seems unlikely that freshmen would hold themselves aloof from dormitory activities and traditions, or from close contacts with the upperclassmen. Nor would we expect that dormitory styles are so different that a randomly assigned freshman would feel completely out of place in one dormitory but not in another (notwithstanding student belief to the contrary). Experience with the new system would indicate whether modifying the randomness of initial assignments by providing incoming freshmen with a dormitory preference form would be desirable.

7. What would the policy be with respect to special dormitory houses such as McCormick, the language houses, and Chocolate City, if freshmen are assigned randomly?

Response: Most members of the Committee concluded that a single-sex option must be offered to both male and female freshmen, in the form of a dormitory such as McCormick or in the form of single-sex halls, entries, or suites. As to the language houses and Chocolate City, the Committee did not discuss the question in depth, leaving it to be resolved at a later stage by the appropriate groups. The issue is whether freshmen would have

a chance to indicate these houses as a preference, or whether students would wait until the sophomore year to join.

8. Students have numerous opportunities to make friends outside their residential groups through classes, departments, sports, and other extracurricular activities, so they already have the diversity of friendships and experiences that is claimed to be lacking.

Response: At MIT, as in other colleges, one's friends are predominantly drawn from one's living group, and the strong identification with one's living group has already been noted as a characteristic of MIT students. The recommended policy seeks to provide two such experiences, rather than just one.

9. The recommended policies include the eventual acquisition or building of new dormitories. That will be very expensive, an expense not necessitated if the present system is maintained. Providing the recommended improvements in orientation and in programs and support in the residences would also be costly.

Response: Some new dormitory housing will be needed in the near future, even under the present system, because rents for private housing are prohibitive, because fewer students have been interested in joining ILGs in recent years (mostly because of the smaller number of undergraduate men), and because of other problems faced by some ILGs (see the Report of the Independent Living Group Review Committee of December, 1988). If the MIT undergraduate experience over the next decades would be strengthened substantially by making the changes we recommend, then the benefits would outweigh the cost of the additional housing and of new programs. In ways discussed in the next section, implementation of the recommended policy on freshman housing could go forward in parallel with planning for the new dormitory space.

Summary: Discussion of the recommended policies

Although the questions and arguments just reviewed show why there is honest disagreement about whether the recommended policies will have the intended effects and whether adverse consequences will outweigh the benefits, a substantial majority of the Committee believed that, on balance, the long-term interests of MIT as an undergraduate institution would be served by making the changes we have recommended.

V. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDED POLICIES: THE TRANSITION PROCESS

Changes in programs, in faculty involvement, and in student governance in the residential system. While the most highly-charged and controversial issue facing the Freshman Housing Committee has been whether to defer Rush and house all freshmen on campus, much of our thinking and discussion has focussed on a set of related matters concerning the quality of life in MIT's residential system as a whole. These discussions suggested that a substantial opportunity for improvement exists, independent of whether all freshmen live in dormitories. While the Committee developed effective consensus on a number of recommendations in principle, we were not in a position to make firm or specific recommendations for implementing reform. Further detailed discussion in the appropriate forum will be needed, and we strongly recommend that such discussions be undertaken. Appendix B provides a more complete account of our thinking on these matters.

Concerning freshmen, additional faculty involvement and staff support would be needed to provide programs in the dormitories and elsewhere directed toward them, to achieve the goal of providing a better transitional experience. Upperclass students would need to be enlisted as assistant staff in the dormitories and would themselves require some kind of training and support. Changes in student governance and in the Dean's Office regulations for dormitories (such as those already made for 1989-90) may well be necessary.

Finding about 350 extra dormitory beds to accommodate all freshmen. There are a number of ways in which the needed places in the dormitory system could be obtained, such as the establishment of residential sororities (one of which is in prospect), an increase in the percentage of students joining ILGs in the sophomore year (as compared to the present percentage joining in the freshman year), the upgrading of underutilized dormitory space, and (during a transitional period) the provision of rent subsidies to upperclass students willing to move into private housing. Each of these ways of making extra space (except the upgrading of current facilities, which has dollar costs) has potential costs to the residential community, however: residential sororities may be desired by their members, but increase gender segregation; having a larger percentage of MIT students join ILGs in the final three years would also increase gender segregation given the current percentage of single-gender ILGs; rent subsidies would take away older members of the dormitories, potentially undercutting community life.

In the long run, therefore, the Committee believes that the addition of some dormitory space, between 350 and 500 beds, will be essential to the success of the residential system. Even without a change in residential policy changes in the student body, the high cost of private housing, and other factors place in jeopardy the important goal of housing all undergraduates

within the residential system. Present crowding and exclusion of some categories of students from dormitories could also be addressed by adding dormitory space.

A transition period to minimize adverse impacts on the ILGs and to smooth out the shift from freshman-year to sophomore-year pledging. If Recommendations 1 and 2 are accepted, it will be important to work with the ILGs to make as smooth a transition as possible. This might include a year or two with both freshman and sophomore pledging, thus giving freshmen the option of waiting a year to enter the ILG system. Planning for deferred Rush could begin in the meantime. Upperclass ILG members as well as dormitory residents should be encouraged to participate in the new Orientation program, the student advisory system for the freshman year, and other programs for freshmen. Policies need to be thought through concerning ILGs that are in trouble, to allow as painless as possible a transition to a different structure, or to the closing of such ILGs (note that such policies are needed whether or not MIT adopts the present recommendation on housing freshmen).

Other steps to implement the recommended policies. Necessary steps include:

-the development of mechanisms for placing freshmen in dorms.

-planning for the new Orientation.

-planning the process of housing choice for the spring of the freshman year.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Committee procedure

A.1. Charge to the Committee

A.2. Individuals and groups who talked with the Committee, and written materials that we read

Appendix B: Enhancing residential quality of life: Further considerations

Appendix C: Evaluation of the recommended policies after implementation

Appendix A.1

Charge to the committee to review MIT undegraduate housing policy as it affects freshman class

6 September 1988

Background

Each year MIT admits approximately 1,000 freshmen, all of whom are eligible for housing. In addition it admits 80 transfer students, 40 of whom are also housed on campus. An additional 40 readmits and students returning from leave are also provided housing as are approximately 25 special cases each year. Thus, MIT is committed to finding rooms for approximately 1,105 newly entering students and to keeping each of those students in housing for four years. In any given year, MIT has dormitory space for between 600 and 630 newly entering students. Of the remaining 490 students, each year the fraternities provide housing for approximately 350 (plus or minus 25), with the 140 or so remaining students finding housing in two ways, either off-campus, which accounts for a very small percentage of the remainder, or through initial crowding, which accounts for roughly 95% of the short-fall. Crowding diminishes over the course of the first semester by approximately 15% (to between 110 and 125 crowds) and then levels off at that number for the remainder of the year.

(A committee chaired by Professor Robert Kennedy has been studying independent living groups at MIT and has, among other things, been concerned with the state of current MIT housing stock across the river. The results of this committee should constitute part of the input of the Housing Policy Committee.)

Residence Selection

At the moment, first exposure of freshmen to MIT is dominated by the search for housing on campus. In fact, past studies, most recently those conducted by members of the R/O Study Committee chaired by Professor Thomas Allen of the Sloan School, indicate that MIT places a far greater emphasis on residence selection during the orientation period than all of its comparable sister institutions. An important question

that has to be faced is whether R O. by concentrating, as it currently does on residence selection, makes a sense of membership in MIT secondary to a sense of membership in a specific living group, whether this is, in fact, a good or a bad thing, and if the latter what, if anything, can be done to improve the situation.

The Demographics

In conducting its work the Committee will need to take into account the changing demographics of the MIT student body. Most notably, the increase in women, underrepresented minorities and Asian American students has shrunk the traditional pool of potential fraternity members, thereby contributing to a perception that there is greater pressure on the fraternity system to fill its empty beds each year. A second consequence of the changing demographics is that with more women represented in the student body, the current R/O experience, dominated as it is by rush, becomes problematic for two reasons. First, women have a narrower set of living group options than men since they have only dorms, WILG and a small number of coed fraternities to choose from and within dorms, their single-sex options are more limited than for men. For these reason, the R/O introduction to MIT is less relevant to them as women because residence selection is almost exclusively male residence selection. Secondly, the increasing numbers of women in the entering class is leading to gender segregation, with women comprising a majority of those residing in dormitories and the fraternity system staying almost exclusively male.

The Charge

In view of the above the charge to this Committee is two-fold. First, the Committee should study the impact that R/O has on the quality of life and character of the MIT community, with special reference to the freshman class. Second, the Committee should consider whether alternative policies are called for in light of their findings and, if so, to assess the pros and cons of those policies; including a policy that would require essentially all freshmen to live in Institute dormitories. Recommendations and attention to the implications of these recommendations as well as to issues relating to their implementation are also within the purview of this Committee.

Appendix A.2
Individuals and Groups Who Talked with the Committee and Written Materials the Committee Read

Michael C. Behnke, Director of Admissions (1/10/89)
Marilyn Braithwaite, Assistant Dean, ODSA (1/10/89)
Peter H. Brown, Associate Bursar (3/22/89)
Anthony J. Canchola, Assistant Dean, ODSA (OME) (1/10/89)
Luisa R. Contreiras, Undergraduate Association (4/26/89)
William R. Dickson, Senior Vice President (1/9/89)
Neal H. Dorow, Advisor to Fraternities and ILGs, ODSA (1/11/89)
Andrew M. Eisenmann, Assistant Dean, ODSA (4/5/89)
Mary Z. Enterline, Associate Dean, ODSA (4/5/89)
Paul E. Gray, President (2/8/89)
James T. Higginbotham, Housemaster, Senior House (4/26/89)
Susanna C. Hinds, Director of Campus Activities (4/5/89)
Interfraternity Council (4/12/89)
Bobbie Knable, Dean for Student Affairs, Tufts (3/22/89)
Brian J. Lasher, Undergraduate Association (4/26/89)
Patrick Mooneyham, Director of Residence Life, Brandeis (3/22/89)
Robert M. Randolph, Associate Dean, ODSA (1/11/89)
Stacy A. Segal, Undergraduate Association (4/26/89)
Robert Simha, Director of Planning (1/9/89)
Moya Verzhbinsky, R/O Advisor, ODSA (4/5/89)
Jan Walker, Housemaster, McCormick (4/26/89)
Robin Worth, Freshman Advisor, Harvard (3/22/89)
Bruce Wrightman, Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Tufts (3/22/89)

A random survey of 19 students was conducted informally by members of the Committee.

"A Home Away from Home," *College, The Undergraduate Experience*, Ernest L. Boyer, 1987

Committee on Student Environment Interim Housing Report, 1963

Freshman Essays on R/O, 1985

Freshman Handbook, 1988-1989

How Freshmen Experience Residence/Orientation Week at MIT, Results of Surveys Given at the Beginning and End of R/O Week 1986, by Robin Wagner and Susan Zarzeczny, September 6, 1988

"Living Groups," excerpts from *Class of 1988: Senior Survey Letters from Seniors to Associate Provost Jay Keyser*

Report of the Committee on Academic and Residence Orientation, June 1987

Report of the Committee on Student Housing to the President, the Executive Committee of the Corporation, and the Corporation of MIT, June 1956

Report of the Independent Living Group Review Committee: Toward Residential Housing of Quality and Choice for all Undergraduates, December 1988

Student Working Paper on IHTFP, March 20, 1989

Undergraduate Residence, 1988 - 1989

Undergraduate Student Position Statement on the MIT Housing System, March 1989

Appendix B

Enhancing Residential Quality of Life:

Further Considerations

The Committee developed effective consensus on the need for changes and improvements in three areas: (1) the need to increase and enhance residence-centered contact between undergraduates, faculty/staff, and graduate students; (2) the need to develop and promulgate widely-shared criteria for acceptable behavior within MIT's residential communities; and (3) the need for sharpened responsiveness to the residential needs of women students. Although we are not in a position to make firm recommendations for implementing reform, we offer here a brief statement of each area of concern, followed by some indication of possibilities for addressing it.

1. Increasing effective faculty and graduate student presence in all undergraduate living groups. This has at least two elements. First, we simply need more faculty involved. At present, fewer than 75 MIT faculty engage in this form of interaction at any significant level. Some of the Committee felt strongly that such interaction should be an Institute expectation of faculty. There is a lively demand for more Faculty Fellows, residence-based Freshmen Advisors, and House seminars. Other possibilities include an increase in the number of Graduate Residents in the dormitories, as well as introducing Graduate Residents into the ILG system.

Second, this entire system needs a more unified and coherent form of organization. Although the ODSA maintains contact with the people involved in all these programs, these groups often function independently and in ignorance of each other's work. A well-defined and generally understood cooperative network should be established, with clearly drawn lines of linkage and responsibility. One step in this direction, for the dormitories, would be to have each Housemaster more definitively in charge of coordinating the several faculty and graduate resident efforts in his/her house. A similar arrangement might be worked out for every ILG, under the direction of a non-resident but closely involved Faculty Associate.

2. Standards for acceptable student behavior within MIT living groups. This, again, requires two components. First, there must be a practicable consensus--developed and shared in discourse among students, faculty, and the administration--on standards of general conduct in line with principles of human civility and mutual respect. Where necessary, these should be reinforced through appropriate educational programs covering such matters as substance abuse, harassment, sexually transmitted diseases, date rape, security of person and property. Second, the governance and judicial systems within residence halls must be stabilized, strengthened, and made more plainly visible and

accessible, so that any student with a grievance will be able to seek redress without inhibition.

3. Sharpened responsiveness to the residential needs of women students. As MIT moves closer to achieving gender balance in its undergraduate population, it is more important than ever to consider ways of adjusting the housing system to meet more closely some of the particular needs of women. Among the issues to be decided here: whether and how to house existing sororities and those that may be introduced; how to develop more various housing choices for women, including additional coed ILGs; offering enough single-sex suites and/or floors in each nominally coed Institute house to accommodate the preferences of all women living there (this will require careful discussion of what terms like "single sex" and "coedity" mean in the context of dormitory living); reexamining the appropriateness and utility of so-called co-ed bathrooms.

Appendix C

Evaluation of the Recommended Policies

After Implementation

With the implementation of a new policy for housing freshmen, it will be very important to establish a priori what we hope to achieve. We need to identify measures or indicators that can be used to monitor and evaluate the success of the new policy at improving the residential experience of our students. These measures should be based on the goals of the residential system and orientation, as well as on the problems addressed by the new policy.

We recognize that the success of orientation and the performance of the residential system are very hard to evaluate, and it is very hard to separate them from that of other programs, activities, and sources of change. We expect that any evaluation will always rely heavily on subjective and relative assessments. Nevertheless, it will be useful to have some measures, albeit imperfect and incomplete, for assessing the health of the system and the impact of policy changes. In the following, we suggest some possible measures, most of which are currently in use or available, that might be used to evaluate and monitor the proposed policy. Ideally, measurement and evaluation should begin before the policy is implemented, so that before and after measures can be compared and time trends noted.

Orientation. Without going into detail here, the success of each of the components of orientation might be measured by attendance at the relevant events; by reports from staff members of the ODSA, freshman advisors, housemasters, and other staff in contact with freshmen; by post-orientation interviews with freshmen like those conducted in past years; by the extent of participation of upperclass students, both those living in dormitories and members of ILGs; and perhaps by looking at the statistics for overloading, adds, drops, and first-term performance for freshmen as a group. Statistics on participation in extracurricular activities in the first term might also suggest whether or not orientation to these activities was becoming more (or less) successful.

Success in housing all undergraduates. Statistics on the pattern of housing and the number and categories of students denied housing in the residential system, and also those in crowds, are available from the ODSA. They will indicate, over time, whether the basic demand for housing is changing and how successfully it is being met.

Degree of diversity. One concern with the current housing system is the appearance of de facto segregation by gender and to some extent by voluntary clustering along ethnic or racial dimensions. One of our goals is that students should have a chance to form friendships with and work with others of different

racial and ethnic groups, different religion and values, and different gender. We expect that the new policy would result in a system with a more diverse distribution of students in each living group, although we would not want or expect all living groups to have the same mix. There are strong positive reasons for voluntary clustering in some cases, and it will be important to preserve that option as long as those reasons exist.

The degree of diversity is relatively easy to assess, at least along racial, ethnic, and gender lines. For instance, as is now done, we would want to monitor the percentage of females and minority students living in ILGs, as well as across the different units in dormitories.

Integration of freshmen into dormitory life. One issue is whether randomly assigned freshmen, most of whom are expected to leave that dormitory after a year, will be successfully integrated into the life of the House. This includes getting advice and support from upperclass students. Interviews may be needed to answer these questions, and there may be objective measures such as participation in House activities that could be used.

Increase in class spirit and in identification with MIT as a whole. This goal is likely to be very hard to measure in an objective way; again, interviews given to classes before and after the change might give some indication.

Movement within the residential system. The number of students who move from one living group to another could be a useful measure, although it is potentially ambiguous. On the one hand, movement might be a result of a student's dissatisfaction or unhappiness with his/her current living situation, and thus indicate a failing of the residential system. On the other hand, movement might result from a healthy desire for diversity or change. The timing and circumstances of the move could be used to distinguish various cases, together with interviews with the students moving. For instance, moves by freshmen during the first term or year are likely to indicate a failing of the initial placement process, whereas the choice of a new residence at the end of the freshman year could be a positive sign.

Residential options. One goal of the residence system is to provide a range of housing options from which the students can choose, and one problem is the limited choice available to women. As is currently done, we can use the availability of housing along various dimensions (on-campus versus off-campus, singles versus doubles, single-sex living groups versus coed living groups, etc.) to indicate how the amount of choice for various student groups has increased or decreased.

Health of the ILGs. Changes in pledge patterns and occupancy should be followed closely, as they are now, with an awareness that some changes (including some losses of ILGs) are likely for reasons discussed in this and earlier reports. An

evaluation should also be made of possible changes in the cohesion and morale of students in ILGs when residence is delayed until the sophomore year, although measurement will be difficult.

Satisfaction with choice. One goal of the new policy is that there be a better balance across the residences in terms of their relative attractiveness to students. One problem with the current system is that some dormitories are perceived as being more desirable than other dorms. To get some indication of the balance between student preferences and the character of dormitories, one could measure as now the number of students who get their first choice, or who don't get one of their first three choices, etc., when choices are made at the end of the freshman year. Similar measures might be made concerning ILG bids and pledge rates, with the cooperation of the ILGs.

Amount and quality of support. A major function of the residential system is to provide support to the students; although it is not the only source of support, it seems to be the primary source for many students. This support comes in various forms from various people, programs, and activities; it is not clear how to understand or assess the adequacy of this support system without direct measurement. Possibly a survey instrument could be used regularly to evaluate the performance of the residential support system and the results could be used to compare different living groups and programs and to track changes over time.

Faculty involvement. Ways of measuring the extent and type of faculty involvement in orientation and in residentially-based activities could be developed by those responsible for these activities.