Minutes

Present: Barbara Baker, Liz Denys, Alex Evans, Danielle Guichard-Ashbrook, Shee Shee Jin, Muriel Medard, Norvin Richards, Alex Slocum

Guests: Bob Ferrara (DSL Senior Director of Strategic Planning, Communications and Alumni Relations)

Minutes: Approved from the previous meeting (12/4/09).

Item I: Possibility of 2nd Term Freshmen Moving to FSILGs – with Bob Ferrara

- Background on topic from Liz Denys: This proposal hit the student mailing lists fairly heavily at the beginning of IAP. The proposal would theoretically strengthen the FSILG community and give freshmen more choice about their living situation since second term freshmen currently must live on campus. It is not entirely clear who supports this or what the students think about it, but right now it has about 400 signatures.

- Muriel now has feedback from legal regarding the Freshmen on Campus policy (which went into effect in 2002), and this policy was not created with any binding legal reason.

Overview from Bob Ferrara regarding the AILG response to the proposal

- The FSILG community is very positive now, as opposed to 2002 when they were very unhappy after the Freshmen on Campus Policy went into effect. There was an AILG Board Meeting (Association of Independent Living Groups) last night, January 7th, and the proposal for second term freshmen moving into FSILGs was an agenda item. The AILG Board decided was that they were not enthusiastic about the proposal and would like for FSILGS to strengthen their living groups through the goals set by the AILG body. For a few years the AILG board was upset about the Freshmen on Campus policy, but now that they have accepted the policy progress has been made within the FSILG community. The main points why they don’t approve of the proposal are:
  1. Financially the proposal doesn’t work for FSILGs and MIT (you can’t keep a living space empty for part of the year anticipating people to live there later on).
  2. The AILG focus is on keeping the community healthy as is.
  3. This proposal would also hurt the dorm culture because people would be leaving the residencies in the middle of the year.

- The AILG Goals for 2009-2010 are:
  1. Strengthen Accreditation*: improve evaluation process, identify evaluation criteria, provide more consistency in reporting, and explain the program to undergraduates.
  2. Strengthen Educational Programs: offer and deliver courses in addition to IAP.
  3. Strengthen Partnerships with MIT: (with the Dean’s office, FSILG office, residential life, alumni association, and financial services).
  4. Improve AILG website
  6. Strengthen Alumni Involvement

8. Improve FSILG Livability

9. Establish Summer Housing and Resident Advisor (RA) Policies

10. Obtain member feedback on current AILG programs

*No other college has an FSILG accreditation program that is run by alumni (which MIT has been doing for four-five years). The process involves teams of alumni going to each chapter and talking to members. This has helped to promote best practices and the giving of peer advice. There is a lot of success with this process and it also clears the path for Kaya Miller and her FSILG team for an entry point into more formal procedures when needed. Both a good alumni base and administrative support are needed and contribute to the success of the accreditation.

Discussion:

- Are alumni very concerned with finances for FSILGs? Could second term freshmen residents help with finances?
  - Bob Ferrara: The FSILGs try to run a full house during all terms so a change mid-year wouldn’t make sense; sometimes FSILGs have empty rooms but not always.
  - Could it be useful if you don’t think of the policy as an operating procedure but rather as just being able to fill a few available beds second term? Would this significantly affect many FSILGs or only a few?
  - Bob: This would probably only affect a few FSILGs. Also, it is possible to rush throughout the year, it just isn’t as publicized the second semester.

- Most dormitories that remain full the second semester appear to do so by choice, not because there isn’t other accommodation (the space exists, but not necessarily in dorms that are the students’ first choice), so this proposal wouldn’t necessarily make much of a difference for dorm overcrowding.

- Would this proposal affect students who are coming back from abroad in January and want housing? Or, are there students who apply for housing second semester and get rejected?
  - There are always a small number of people who try to move back to campus and who get rejected. It is probably not a large number of students coming back from abroad who would be affected (would have to check with Karen Nilsson/Housing to verify this). Other people who want housing second semester are readmissions and students living off-campus who want to move back on-campus.
  - There are also many students who receive housing second semester but decide not to use it because the dorm they get placed in is their 3rd choice.

- Are there any statistics on today vs. the past for the attainment rate of living groups?
  - Bob Ferrara: it is probably comparable today to the past.
  - It happens more often in sororities where students don’t de-pledge, but just choose not to live in the chapter house.

- How would the proposal affect the dorm communities? For example, many Baker freshmen boys pledge with fraternities and then spend most of their time at the fraternity houses. However, they still interact with other people from living in the Baker house which wouldn’t have happened if they had only lived at their fraternity house (it is hard to quantify if this is good or bad for the students).
  - As a GRT, Alex Evans does see that members of fraternities (more so than sororities) don’t spend much time at their dorm freshman year. One side effect of allowing
student to leave campus second semester is that the community wouldn’t be having as much say towards who is living in their community.

• Are graduate students (or fifth year students) allowed to live in FSILGs? They could fill empty rooms.
  o Several FSILGs do have annexes that they rent, but typically houses like to keep residency to their chapter.
  o Bob Ferrara: Some FSILGs do list apartment rentals (Linda Patton in Housing has a listing of available rooms) because finances are important, but you also want the community to be healthy.

• Does having empty beds significantly affect a house’s finances or does it just mean that they have less to spend on events, etc.
  o Bob Ferrara: The residents have to pay expenses for living costs, but the average house bill from undergraduates won’t entirely pay for housing. The alumni corporations hold reserves but fundraising is also necessary to cover the housing costs.
  o This is also hard to quantify because in 2002 (when the Freshmen on Campus policy went into effect) many FSILGs recalibrated bed spaces to make things more comfortable and now the students expect the extra space.

Summary:
The proposal considers the possibility of second term freshmen moving off-campus and it is seeking support amongst the MIT community (undergraduates, alumni, etc). The response from the undergraduates is not entirely clear yet (and is unlikely to be uniform), but the view from the AILG Board is officially not enthusiastic. This issue doesn’t appear to be one which the committee needs to delve into deeper at this point in time unless there are further developments.

Item II: Community Response to the Institute Task Force Report
Muriel: The official report came out at the end of the fall term and is now available online along with the individual reports from all of the committees (http://web.mit.edu/instituteplanning/). There has been some very thoughtful and detailed feedback from the UA, GSC, and community meetings; however, there are still a fair number of people who have to read the report. Muriel met with Peter Cummings this past week and discussed how DSL is already taking action on some of the items, e.g. summer housing, and there is intent to follow the recommendations. Is there any further response now that the final report from the Student Life taskforce is released (as there were some changes from the interim report)?
  • Students have noticed that the report mentions the Blue Ribbon Dining Committee, but doesn’t mention the Dining Proposal Committee (DPC) and several of the students working on the committee are concerned.
    o According to Muriel this was not an intentional dismissal and a note could be made on the report acknowledging that committees other than Blue Ribbon also contribute to the report.
  • Are other divisions/sections affected by this report around campus already working from their recommendations?
    o Muriel doesn’t know how the report is affecting other areas apart from Student Life, which does appear to be taking action: For example, DSL will be metering the dormitories and individual dorm rooms as recommended. This will not only encourage energy efficiency, but the savings are recommended to be partially
shared with the students. This recommendation was based upon the Google experiment where individual home owners curbed energy use by 5-15% through metering. The actual energy use by the dorms is currently unknown as the energy bill is for the entire campus and student life pays on a prorated basis per square foot: about $8 million per annum. The assessment is that if the bills accurately reflect student life energy use then about $800,000 could be saved per year and half of those savings could go towards students (in what form was not discussed) and the other half would go towards reduced DSL costs.

- There have been some questions if the community input made a difference. Can Muriel clarify the modifications?
  - The main difference for the student life report concerns the four year dorm guarantee: it is currently written that Ashdown should not move forward until there are more funds. The corollaries to this are to either retain the status quo of overcrowding and not increase the incoming class size, or, if the recommendations of other committees go through to increase the class size then four years of housing will not be guaranteed. The final recommendations are more detailed about the pros and cons then in the interim report.
  - Another modification concerns charging tuition for visiting students (Muriel is waiting for pushback around this issue, but currently has not heard much feedback from colleagues). The current fee is $1,000 per visiting student, and the recommendation is to true this up (prorate fee according to length of stay, secondary costs, make sure all students who get id’s are legitimate).

- There were not many recommendations concerning staff: were support staff on many committees?
  - In general, no. But there were most likely support staff on the Human Resources committee.
  - Staffing levels were looked at because staffing levels in DSL has increased. However, much of this was due to the placement of units under DSL which once resided elsewhere. While doing this there was also a considerable reduction being taken with sports and personnel in S^3. The cost-effectiveness of Housemasters was also considered and it was determined that they are cost-effective.

- It should be kept in mind that $150 million will be cut whether it comes from the taskforce report or not, and many of the recommendations in the report might be a lot less objectionable than what other cuts might be.
- Even if budget cuts don’t have to be made the taskforce should be done on a regular basis just to make sure that everything is in order and cost-effective.
- Time is needed for the report to percolate because many people haven’t had time to read through the whole thing. Thus, it is too early for community action and response.

Summary:
The main community response is that it is too early to really look into the report and the topic should be revisited towards the end of the term. There have been some changes made in response to feedback, other recommendations have remained the same, and a few corrections could be made to the report. Actions have already begun on several of the items.

Item III: Follow-up on the Mentoring Program
(The program would be for undergraduates and graduates and it is still to be decided where it would live organizationally: the plan is to try it and if it works it will find a place organically, or if it doesn’t work it will die. It is not to replace any educational mentoring program, just to enhance the options for students).

- It would be a lot easier to convince undergraduates than graduates that this program would be beneficial. This committee is still waiting for feedback from the GSC.
  - Different graduates are interested in different types of programs, so maybe it would be better to first gauge what the undergraduates want since they have more to gain from the program.
  - Liz Denys has sent out an email survey to undergraduate students and is waiting for responses.
  - The GSC has a meeting at the beginning of February, and either Vivek or Alex can get feedback then.
  - It could also be good to get feedback from GRTs who see both sides of this type of issue.
  - Bob Ferrara recommends asking Bob Owens about the similar mentoring system which he set up within his fraternity about two years ago.

*END OF MEETING*