Housing Strategy Group  
March 11, 2011, 12pm-1pm, 4-110

In attendance: vrajesh (VM), humphrhe (HH), cortiz (CO), tschenk (TS), crj226 (CJ), colins (DC), ccolombo (CC), spatocco (BS), akeyes (AK), rgmark (RM)

Attachments:
Agenda (1 pg)
Discussion Document for Housing Transfer Waitlists (1 pg)
Furniture Rental for MIT Students (1 pg)
On-Campus Room Flagging Project (4 pgs)

An asterisk followed by parentheses in the notes below indicate editors’ notes and are included to clarify the meaning of sections that may otherwise be confusing or ambiguous. Minutes were taken by Vrajesh Modi and Todd Schenk, edited by Henry Humphreys, and reviewed by the committee.

Maseeh applications numbers update
HH: Wanted to give people a quick update on applications for Maseeh; Tech had published numbers that had led to concerns; total number was 277 for people who have applied to live in Maseeh, including Phoenix Group, which leaves 40% of the building to be occupied. Assumes that all 277 people will be accepted by Phoenix group. Does not mean that building will be 40% freshmen; students who reapply or transfers will also be given consideration. Also, students whose applications are not accepted may still have a chance to get in through the normal process.
AK: Application, as viewed by Phoenix Group students, does not include information about building of origin, gender, or class; however, afterwards, Maseeh housemasters will review to make sure there is balance.
CC: Will there be discussions with current housemasters?
AK: We can. Deadline for Maseeh application is 3/25. So far, most students (70% vs 30%) are coming from a dining dorm.
HH: Adam is also working on percent graduating, percent going to Maseeh, etc. so each building can get a projection for what it will look like next year. Students can always switch, but at least gives an idea for what it will look like.
CC: Gender?
AK: About 52% male, 48% female.
CC: Any dorm that’s 50/50?
AK: Random’s pretty close; we *(MIT) are male-heavy.
HH: Wanted you to be informed, because want to give more information to Tech.

Housing transfer waitlists
VM: The concern that gave rise to this line item is that some students feel like they have been on the waitlist for a long time – primarily people coming from dining buildings that want to move out. This data may include some double-counting, however, so the larger question is whether or not there is a problem.
DC: No, this is first choice only.
VM: Want to get a better idea of what the waitlists are. Clearly a lot of moving around the system, so would like to know how long they are waiting. Furthermore, what is an acceptable wait? Is there always a time in the semester when the non-dining dorm waitlists get a lot longer?

DC: Many reasons why people may be intentionally waiting on the list – they defer because they do not, for example, want to move mid-semester. Can usually get someone into new housing within the academic year if they give a couple of choices.

CC: Is it a problem? If you do turn down an assignment, for whatever reason, why do we keep them on the wait list? Isn't it a little odd? Seems that students make requests and can reject multiple times, which skews the data.

RM: So why not just remove the people on the ‘deferred’ list from the statistics? Keep them on the list, but don’t count it as a ‘waitlist’?

AK: The people who are on the list are people that deferred in the fall, so expect to get an offer again.

VM: It appears that the split has widened between requests for dining vs. non-dining.

AK: It really comes down to the individual. There are, however, other reasons why we are seeing shrinkage. In general the list may be a mess, but individuals are getting the best service they can.

VM: If there really are longer lines for certain dorms, is there something we could do to increase their occupancy, or something else?

CC: Agreed, we need to do something to better understand this data. How we count numbers here seems strange too. Need to look at the questions that Vrajesh is asking and answer them in a way that makes sense. Some things for us to think about around whether or not this list is the right service. Do we want to give the deferrers priority, for example, when spots do open?

AK: Sounds like what you want to hear from us is how long it is taking.

VM: That’s one thing I want to know, but I am also interested in supply and demand.

HH: What are the most popular buildings when it comes to housing?

AK: Baker is very popular, and Bexley is the hardest to get into – has a long wait list.

CC: So we need to understand why people are wanting to move. Is it because of dining? Is it because of the proximity of certain dorms to main campus? Is it other things?

VM: Seems like there are a lot of assumptions in this data. I don't know if there is a raw format of this data that could be posted, but it might clarify some of the assumptions. Would be good to have disaggregated data on how many people are deferring, and so on.

CC: What we need to do is start thinking about how this data is going to be collected and analyzed.

HH: Wouldn't be comfortable putting raw data up, but perhaps tasking this committee with deciding how and why the data should be analyzed would be appropriate.

CC: So, does everyone agree that we will charge this group, in the summer, with thinking about how we can answer these questions. Seems very complicated.

HH: Could also be a recommendation to this committee that we simplify things.

*(AK leaves)*

*Noise issues due to railway crossing construction*

TS: More of a question, getting closer to the opening date; one question that we have – deferral to mid-May for construction. Is that highly unrealistic?

DC: Plan is to start in April; can slow down work during finals, etc., if necessary. One of the concerns is that they’ve gone ahead with all the assumptions and decisions that Steve *(Lerman)*
made. Whole alley will be redone; will go across parking lot with different set of pavement, add trees. *(Pointing to map)
CO: Timeline?
DC: Starts in April.
CO: City ordinances for noise?
DC: 7am-6pm during week, 9am-6pm during weekend.
CC: Who’s responsible?
DC: One of Dick Amster’s project managers. The only piece the railroad does is a small section.
CC: So mostly our *(MIT’s) work?
DC: Union contracts pay from 7am, regardless of actual start time.
CC: Ok, but can still start later during exams. Who’s going to be affected by noise?
BS: Significant concern from Warehouse residents … this will be a significant detachment point; will there be a bell?
HH: They wouldn’t decouple the train; they have to slow down and blow horn; if they see anyone on the tracks, they have to blow horn, so unless there’s a designated area …
BS: That’s our concern; there might be discussions that need to start now, because people are living 10 meters away; do we need to put a soundproof wall up?
CC: Lesson in “be careful what you ask for”?
HH: Horn’s going to be there. Won’t say you get used to it, but not as obnoxious as what you think; they might not blow it next to building.
BS: Needs to be very clearly communicated to housemasters; there are 10-20 rooms that are now going to be adjacent.
HH: Anyone in that vicinity will hear the horn.
CC: I hear the horn now at Next; lived at Long Island RR when I was growing up.
BS: Can we make sure that it’s communicated very clearly to Warehouse people; it’s their space.
DC: Simmons should be involved as well.
CC: So on construction, work with Dick Amster’s people about regular times and exam times; same with MTA people about that small piece. Then, MTA can come in and give us a presentation on what they anticipate the usage of these tracks.
RM: Might be better to not have the discussion with MTA; nothing to gain …
DC: Going back to decoupling … right now students are going across, so something has to be done; this is the best way to get to campus.
CO: Option to fast-track out people who want to move?
DC: Can definitely let people who are getting that room know. Any RAs might also want to move. Can do all that this summer.
CO: When I moved to Boston, lived in Beacon Hill; realized after moving that MGH helipad was right next to my room!
DC: People need to know what’s coming.
HH: Need to know decibel levels, how far from building, etc.
DC: Facilities has hired a consultant who will be able to answer all these questions, so we’ll have a good idea of where this is going to go.

Furniture rental for graduate housing
DC: Wanted to share this with you – realized we’re already doing this. We have an off-campus piece; Churchill is part of Cort; MIT does a lot of rental. They have this deal for our students,
who are living off-campus. They would love to expand to our graduate dorms; can certainly make it available to the residence halls that don’t have furniture.

HH: Rate must be an MIT-negotiated rate.

TS: Already substantial amount for graduate students; we were asking whether possible to have an exchange that the Institute runs.

DC: MIT has a furniture exchange, which is available all the time now.

TS: My understanding is that by the time new students get there, you really could not furnish a house from it, by the time students arrive in the fall.

RM: They get some from students, but not most; don’t know if pricing is particularly advantageous; used to have a policy that would give back a fraction of what you paid, but don’t think they do that anymore.

CC: Which dorms are we talking about?

TS: Family dorms; could argue that someone who makes a choice to go to Edgerton … particularly international families are here for a one or two year program, students have to go to IKEA.

CC: Why don’t we furnish family housing?

DC: Something that we never did; different families have different special needs.

CC: Children is one thing; can have an expectation for cribs; but what sparked the question is, can we do one of the married student housing?

DC: What would we furnish? Living room, and dining room?

TS: One of the bedrooms?

DC: Would be an undertaking, cost-wise.

CC: So then, if you want a furnished apartment, you pay a little more; can amortize cost.

Edgerton not furnished, so keeps that option open.

HH: Us furnishing is a lot better, because of bedbugs, etc.

CC: Why don’t we look at furnishing one of our married student buildings, and will do it as families move out. Can we look at that, and see if it solves problem?

BS: Can we go back and talk to students who live there?

HH: Preferences on type of furniture, etc.

CC: If there’s a good number of people who want it; as you slowly transition the building, can have both options. All people coming from overseas – many will be pleased.

RM: Need to compare the costs. Not clear that one isn’t a better option.

CC: So lots of questions for grad students. Sounds like we have some options.

MIT/GSC collaborative agreement

BS: Working with housing, one of the things that has come out of collaboration is rooms that are “anomalies”; received complaints in the fall; student that was assigned a room that was triangular, because expectation was not at all what he received; came to us, and we decided to take a larger approach; no recourse for students who are getting something different from what they expect when signing contract; essence of proposal is that housemasters and house governments can flag rooms under one of three abnormalities; some rooms have received water damage, for example; spoken agreement that if a student receives one of those rooms, or one with rodents, etc., then that person is alerted before moving in.

DC: Make sure everyone understands – flagging means that we are telling them what they’re getting, and if they say no, then no $250 fine. If they decide to go in, then they know what they’re getting.
CO: How many rooms total?
DC: Looks like the house governments really put thought into it. Agree that there are anomalies, some rooms with noise. *(Refers to handout)*
BS: Often, international students don’t feel comfortable calling the administration, want to let them know that they shouldn’t feel embarrassed turning these down.
CC: Four rooms above Thirsty Ear?
BS: No soundproofing.
DC: They did soundproofing for that.
BS: Can still hear it.
HH: Still need to work with operation for Thirsty Ear.
CC: Can also do assessment of soundproofing; vibrations from chillers, next to gym, gym is also student governance issue, because we’re going to do that at Next – at midnight, gym closes.
BS: Very hard thing to implement in graduate residences because most people start workouts at 10pm or 11pm; surprising what you can hear from general use; at SidPac, listened from second floor.
RM: Suppose you go into a flagged room, and are bothered by vibration. What’s your option?
DC: We would work with them to find another room in the building. Might be able to get them out of lease without penalty, too.
BS: Better to tell them in July, so student has a month-and-a-half.
RM: Can’t assess if you’re not here. Question is what are you willing to put up with.
*(Meeting was adjourned due to time. In general, there was agreement in support of MIT/GSC collaborative agreement.)*
AGENDA

Item I: Noise Issues due to Railway Crossing construction (T. Schenk)
Item II: Furniture Rental for graduate housing (T. Schenk)
Item III: MIT/GSC Collaborative agreement (B. Spatocco)
Item IV: Massey application numbers update (H. Humphreys)
Item V: Housing Transfer Waitlists (V. Modi)
Furniture Rental for MIT Students

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Housing Strategy Group
3/11/2011
Discussion Document for Item V: Housing Transfer Waitlists

Housing Capacities:

- **Pre-Maseeh:** Dining (1246, 43%), Non-Dining (1674, 57%)
- **Post-Maseeh:** Dining (1706, 51%), Non-Dining (1674, 49%)

Undergraduates have been concerned about the length of the transfer waitlists, especially with regard to dining vs. non-dining dorms.

To discuss:
- How long are the waitlists, time-wise?
- What is the target (i.e. complete transfer request within x months)?
- How has number of transfers changed over the years (i.e. is the trend above expected)?
- If this is a problem, then what are some possible solutions?
Background:

It has come to the Graduate Student Council’s (GSC) attention through a number of student complaints that there is room for improvement in the MIT graduate student housing allocation process with regards to the imposition of cancellation fees. Specifically, as the process works now, a student who enters the housing assignment process and receives a placement does not have knowledge of the room geometry, location, or history when required to enter into contract. As a result, there have been a number of cases where students have entered into contracts with MIT Housing for an accommodation which has some deficiency with respect to the standard room and which significantly detracts from their experience as a resident and student at the institute. Unfortunately, there is currently no formal recourse available or outlined to students who receive deficient rooms such that they may annul a contract without being charged a termination fee.

Proposal:

Since it would be logistically and financially infeasible for MIT Housing to deal with every complaint on a case-by-case basis, we propose an intermediate solution whereby house governments, in conjunction with House Masters and Managers, have the power to “flag” a limited number of rooms which suffer from particularly undesirable circumstances, which we will hereafter refer to as “room abnormalities”. These flagged rooms and their details will then be forwarded to MIT Housing, who will then have the responsibility of informing the respective lottery assignees that their room has been flagged, the details of the flag, and that they have the right to terminate their contract without imposition of cancellation fees. This information must be provided with the initial room allocation and sufficient time allowed for a student to investigate further the circumstances of their assignment. House managers are expected to avail themselves to affected students and act as points of contact for relevant inquiries and concerns.

Currently, there do exist similar informal arrangements between housing and select residences. The GSC, through the Housing and Community Affairs (HCA), supports these current structures and would consider, should future circumstances necessitate and prove appropriate, formalizing these agreements as well. In addition, current residences which have opted to not take advantage of this room flagging system at this time are eligible to participate in future years should their leaders decide it is in the best long-term interests of their residents.
Housing Abnormalities:

A justified “housing abnormality” must fall into one of the three categories in order to be eligible for flagging by house governments and house managers:

1. **Internal Abnormality (I):** The room itself has received damage or depreciation far in excess of what is to be expected from normal occupancy, given the life of the building. Examples may include holes in walls, significant water damage, reoccurring pest/rodent infestation issues, and/or repeated failures of hot water, water pressure, or air conditioning systems.

2. **Structural Abnormality (S):** The room’s physical design or size is such that the life of the inhabitant may be significantly and negatively impacted. Examples may include rooms with particularly awkward geometry, rooms with load-bearing columns taking up space, or rooms without windows.

3. **External Abnormality (E):** The room is located near or adjacent to some external factor which significantly depreciates the quality of life for the inhabitant. Examples may include living next to or under loud air-conditioning systems, living adjacent to dumpsters or loading docks, or being within audible distance of some room/facility which is often noisy beyond established quiet hours.

House Government Responsibility:

We have asked all house governments interested in participating in this program to provide the Housing and Community Affairs (HCA) Committee with the following information:

1. **Room Numbers:** A list of rooms which, in the best judgment of the House Government officers, House Masters, and House Managers, fulfills at least one of the aforementioned three types of abnormalities.

2. **Abnormality Marking:** Indicates whether the abnormality is due to internal (I), external (E), or structural (S) issues.

3. **Description:** A clear, unbiased, and concise description (no more than a paragraph) about why the room has been flagged. This section should not include personal experiences or recommendations; it is to be entirely factual and will be provided by housing to the lottery assignee.

4. **Contact:** This individual (e.g., House Manager) serves as a point of contact for the student who has the ability to open up dialogue with the lottery assignee, should the student choose to inquire.

It is emphasized here that flags should not be given out recklessly and should only be allocated to rooms that are clearly disadvantaged as compared to the average room in that building. Although we feel this system helps to create a more equitable and transparent housing allocation process, we also believe that the ability to flag rooms is a privilege that should not be abused. Although flags can be added or removed in a dynamic manner, it is strictly advised that such vacillating behavior be avoided. As flags represent rooms suffering from significant abnormalities, rooms which could be interpreted variously from one hall government to the next are most likely not eligible for a flagging. Finally, in order to adjust a flagged list, hall governments, in conjunction with a house manager, must make
a formal request to Housing at least one month in advance of the beginning of the next housing allocation process.

HCA Responsibility:

The Housing and Community Affairs Committee (HCA) is charged with the following actions:

1. Working with MIT Housing and providing advice and oversight on implementation.
2. Advocating on behalf of residences and acting as a mediator between house governments and MIT Housing in the event of disagreements or grievances.
3. Working with hall governments to maintain/update the flagged room lists. HCA should provide insight as to what is appropriate for flagging and discourage excessive flagging behavior.

MIT Housing Responsibility:

The MIT Housing Office is to keep on record all flagged rooms and update at least once a year with the HCA regarding list maintenance. The Housing Office is also responsible for implementing, using, whatever method is most complementary and amenable to their current system and staff, a way of informing students allocated a flagged room of their situation and options available. Additionally, MIT Housing has full control over the timeline of its allocation processes throughout the year but is expected to inform recipients of flagged rooms in a timely manner such that it allows students to make contact with House Managers, weigh options, and make a final decision comfortably. Finally, the Housing Office will allow students assigned to flagged rooms to cancel their assignment without penalty if cancellation request is received by email by the specified deadline given from the Housing Office. Deadlines will be based either on the date of notification of flagged assignment, or based on the assigned move-in date, whichever allows for more consideration on the part of the resident. After a resident has moved into an assignment, he/she will be responsible for termination policies and fees related to the termination of an assignment. The Housing Office will allow a student who has terminated a contract to put his or her name on a waiting list with the understanding that they may well receive a flagged room once again.
Flagged Rooms (updated: March 1st, 2011)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SidPac</td>
<td>134B</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Vibration issues from chillers during summer months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SidPac</td>
<td>235B</td>
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<tr>
<td>SidPac</td>
<td>287AB</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Room located above gym, experiences noise issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>SidPac</td>
<td>289AB</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Room located above gym, experiences noise issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>SidPac</td>
<td>291AB</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Room located above gym, experiences noise issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>SidPac</td>
<td>668B</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Roof leaks during heavy snow and rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashdown</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Located over the Music Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashdown</td>
<td>2090</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Located above the TV Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashdown</td>
<td>2112A</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Located above the Thirsty Ear Pub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashdown</td>
<td>2113C</td>
<td>E</td>
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<td>Ashdown</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td>Awkward room geometry</td>
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<td>019D</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Structural Pole in middle of bedroom</td>
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<td>319B</td>
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<td>Edgerton</td>
<td>419B</td>
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Points of Contact:

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<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sidney-Pacific</td>
<td>House Manager</td>
<td>Jack Ahern</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jacka@mit.edu">jacka@mit.edu</a></td>
<td>(617) 253-0553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashdown House</td>
<td>House Manager</td>
<td>Denise Lanfranchi</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dlan@mit.edu">dlan@mit.edu</a></td>
<td>(617) 253-2963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgerton House</td>
<td>House Manager</td>
<td>Trudy Morris</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rainbow@mit.edu">rainbow@mit.edu</a></td>
<td>(617) 253-4954</td>
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