

Committee on Student Life (CSL)
Friday, March 19, 2010
Minutes taken by Astrid Hansen

Minutes

Present: Muriel Medard, Barbara Baker, Chris Colombo, Enectali Figueroa-Feliciano, Danielle Guichard-Ashbrook Vivek Sakhrani, David Singer,

Guests: Karen Nilsson - Senior Associate Dean for Residential Life
Dennis Collins – Director of Housing
Robin Baughman - Assistant Director for Housing

Minutes from 2/26/10: To be approved at next meeting.

Agenda I: Housing

Part 1: Overview of the Summer Utilization Project presented by Dennis Collins

Karen: A large initiative from the Institute Taskforce was about the summer utilization project (there are articles in The Tech, etc) and today we will walk through where DSL is in the process and what is happening. We will also be giving CSL an overview on housing assignments and overcrowding.

Dennis: The taskforce had charged DSL to defragment and improved summer housing and as a result there is a new policy for the summer and a guide was sent to all undergraduate students yesterday. Starting in the summer students will be in just three residence halls. This plan was decided by the Housing Strategy Group (HSG) which was charged by the Chancellor to figure out how to improve summer utilization. The group consists of Steve Lerman and Chris Colombo as chairs of the committee, Karen Nilsson and Dennis Collins, members from the GSC, UA, and Housemasters; instead of just Housing deciding a plan there were many other constituents.

- The recommendation that the group came up with was to defragment summer housing by putting students in designated buildings over the summer, conferences in other buildings, and to make renovations and repairs in the buildings not being used. The projected savings will be about \$500,000. This year there will be three houses for students, five for conferences, and four will be closed.
- Residencies: East Campus, Next House, and Phoenix Group at Ashdown will be the three residencies for students in order to maximize the use of space (instead of having students spread out over many buildings). These dormitories were chosen based upon the following criteria and concerns voiced by students: the buildings have facilities to allow students to cook for themselves, accessibility, air conditioning, and are places that all MIT communities can fit well in. The move will try to maintain community cultures by moving groups to floors of buildings, for example, there will be an all women's section in Phoenix.
- Conference halls: Right now there are 3,000 beds available during the summer, but only 600-800 students remain over the summer. Therefore, to maximize the use of rest of the beds conferences are booked (typically 2-3 years in advance). The dormitories used for conferences this summer will be Baker House, McCormick Hall, New House, Senior House and Simmons Hall. There has been some student concern that murals will be painted over in the buildings being used for conferences: this will not happen, but rather conferences will be found that don't mind buildings with murals.

- It is hoped that in the future we can build up revenues by hosting conferences.
- It has also been decided that the summer conferencing needs to be done professionally because it is not a low level administrative job. Sarah Hudson (HUDSONS@MIT.EDU) will be the person working on this and it is expected that there will be more conferences next year (most conferences need to know at least a year in advance).
- Conference services have gone down since 9/11, but youth programs and programs through the Chancellor have increased. A few years ago Housing started reaching out to faculty, and though we do target large conferences currently we are targeting several smaller ones.
- Closed buildings: Target renovations will take place in the closed buildings as needed and will be projects like painting, mechanical work, replacement of fire alarms and rugs. The buildings closed for maintenance will be Bexley Hall, Burton-Conner, MacGregor, and Random Hall. Savings will be brought on by doing the repairs when students are not in the buildings because the work can start earlier in the morning, go later in the evening, and it won't just be pieces done one at a time.
- This summer we will not lay off any staff, but we will be cutting back on the extra staff that is typically hired over the summer. This compensation includes overtime reduction for housekeepers, maintenance workers and night watchmen through the redeployment of staff, front desk workers, grunge workers (high school kids hired to help move furniture), MITemps, and Professional Staffing Group.
- Housing will provide moving for students at the end of May into summer housing and also in August for moving back into regular buildings. Storage will be placed in target areas that will not be needed (game rooms, etc) and there will be an off-campus options for students that is cost-effective.
- The long term plan is to look at summer housing every fall in order to decide what changes need to be made that year (the same buildings won't be closed every year), to develop long term strategies, and to market and seek out new conferences to fill all of the available beds.

Discussion:

Will there be any problem with removing asbestos?

- Asbestos can be removed even when students are occupying buildings (MIT has very high standards for asbestos removal; the process is safe). In Random Hall and Burton-Conner this has been done every summer (one floor every year, three floors remain) and in MacGregor there is just one more floor to be done.

It is very impressive that there will be no layoffs by Housing over the summer.

- Cutting down on extra summer staffing will allow MIT people to stay employed.

Can housing accommodate individuals for several days?

- Housing can help if the person is sponsored by MIT (coming to an office or a lab), but not for non-sponsored visitors (MIT Housing is not a hotel). Keep in mind that we are talking about the summer, during the year if graduate housing is available visiting scholars and post docs can be housed (but for a longer period of time, i.e. a semester or the year). Graduate housing availability also varies depending on the time of the year.
- In the future there might also be a package offered including both housing and dining. Dining is currently a big initiative and though it won't be ready this year, it will hopefully be ready by next year.

- All information about housing assignments is on the housing website (<http://web.mit.edu/housing/>). The new housing website will be available on April 5th, but the same info can be found on the current website.

What are the levels of accommodation/service offered to conferences?

- Several different levels: for youth programs with us all summer whose beds aren't changed (they are provided sheets but must wash them themselves) the cost is lower, for educational programs for adults where sheets are changed, beds made, and bathrooms cleaned it is more expensive.
- Most residence halls are not air-conditioned but they are provided with fans.
- MIT Housing is a way for conferences to save money because dormitories are not the same as hotels. It just depends on what the conference is looking for in terms of amenities, cost, and accessibility (sometimes conferences will book both hotel rooms and on-campus housing).

A couple of years ago policies were also changed to make it harder for students to leave on-campus housing on a whim and because students must pay fines it encourages them to give more warning when they leave and to create less vacancies (this models real world leases).

Part 2: Summary of Housing Assignment and Crowds presented by Robin Baughman

Robin: There are two main lotteries a year for graduate students; one in May and one in September (the May lottery includes the most assignments because it allows for students who want to continue their assignments the following year as well as for the incoming class). There is also an October/November lottery for people with February degrees coming in the spring and for people moving back to campus. There is also one transfer lottery a year for students (typically about 40 students total) to switch residence halls.

For undergrads the overall number of students in dormitories next year will go up. In late August the numbers are projected for the following year. For the past several years there have been fluctuations in the number of students renewing housing the fall term. Last year by the middle of spring there were about 60 vacancies in housing, this year the number of vacancies was down to 20 which means that there are more students who will be renewing housing for this upcoming fall, and because the incoming class size is decided long before spring term this means there will be overflow in the fall.

- About two-thirds of the rooms that accommodate overcrowding are doubles converted into triples, and about one-third of the rooms are singles converted into doubles.
- The last resort for overflow is to turn lounges into rooms: MacGregor lounges have the proper square footage for becoming double rooms. Many Housemasters are bothered that the viable MacGregor lounge space isn't being utilized when there is overcrowding in some many other dorms. The problem is that while the lounges are beautiful rooms with great views and would be spacious doubles, it would then mean that eight people are sharing a bathroom instead of six, and they won't have a lounge area. It would also have to be decided if the lounges would be converted temporarily or permanently.
- Housing is making strides to improve the overflow situation especially during enrollment to make sure that the numbers don't increase. A comfortable overcrowding number is 80-100 because in the spring this number will go down when students move into vacant rooms (in the spring overcrowding is optional because there are enough available rooms. If students choose to stay in overcrowded rooms it is because it is less expensive, they want to stay with their friends, etc).
- The upcoming class of 1070 students will have about the same amount of crowding as this past year. However, this means that there are current vacancies not being offered

currently in order to ensure all freshmen can be housed (and not everyone who wants to move back to campus can do so).

Discussion:

It seems as though freshmen are the group most affected by overcrowding because they are the most likely to be overcrowded and they don't have the option of living off-campus; they get the least quality experience with the fewest options. It is unclear how to solve this but perhaps the quality of freshman life should be discussed at the DormCon level.

- Most institutions have a seniority system for room selection (MIT isn't that much different from other schools in this sense), but some schools do all freshmen housing to avoid the class system.

We also will have some transition when W1 reopens. By June 30th, 2010 it should be known if the construction on W1 will be continuing at present, or if it will be delayed until 2012.

- Additionally, we do have FSILGs and students can choose to live off-campus. In terms of enrollment, overcrowding will most affect students who want to move back on campus more than it affects students already on campus or freshmen.

The taskforce brought up the fact that there is a de facto housing guarantee.

- If every student who lives on campus chose to stay on campus housing would have a huge problem. Even 50 more students staying on campus means 50 more crowded rooms: overcrowding could be an economic factor, but it is hard to say if it is becoming a trend.
- One thing that MIT can do is to boast about how the dormitories keep students from being a big problem in the city of Cambridge. If housing policies were changed because of overcrowding there might be more student problems within Cambridge that would have to be dealt with.

What happens to crowding if a FSILG is no longer able to remain independent (might be something to ask Kaya Miller).

- With the new AILG system, fraternities are able to turn themselves around (e.g., Kappa Sigma has made strides from several years ago), the problem is when there are issues with the actual buildings. Housing does not have the capacity to do emergency housing and ATO was a factor in overcrowding this year. Every fraternity was charged last year with coming up with a contingency plan in case something happens to their building.

Next meeting:

We might look at FSILGs (Kaya Miller and others should be asked to attend).

Muriel has also talked to the Chair of the Faculty about CSL producing a regular faculty report (towards the end of the term the Committee will be asked to help redact/distill the main ideas and issues that we have looked at this year: primarily we have looked at all of the main themes in the taskforce report).

END OF MEETING.