

FR: Suzy Nelson

TO: Undergraduate Residence Hall Presidents

DATE: February 17, 2019

RE: Materials for the March 2 design exercise workshop due on February 25

Dear House leaders:

I am writing to share materials that I hope will help your communities prepare for the March 2 workshop. The attached submission and feedback forms, as well as the agenda, reflect input from the student facilitators we've been working with to plan the workshop. The facilitators (listed on the attached agenda) are ready to be resources to you throughout this process.

As you'll likely recall, draft designs are due to roomassignments@mit.edu by February 25. Please note, however, that it's perfectly okay if your house's draft is a work in progress, and it's okay if it's brief. We are not looking for perfection – there will be time before, during, and after the workshop for you to receive and incorporate feedback on your design.

I know that the design exercise has prompted questions in your communities, and I want to help you answer those questions. Cindy and I will be writing to all undergraduates this week about this effort and next steps in the process. For now, though, I hope the information below is useful for conversations with your communities.

1. **Our primary goal is to enlist students' help in improving the room-assignment and move-in processes.** While the design exercise is rooted in two requirements, we want you to be innovative in your thinking. If you have additional ideas for improvements that are unrelated to the constraints, we want to hear them.
2. **We share responsibility for addressing these issues.** At the end of the day, senior leaders are tasked with promoting the best possible student experience and addressing areas of concern. With shared governance, however, comes shared responsibility. We all play a role in responding to issues in our communities--**students, house teams, and staff need to work together to devise creative solutions that we can all get behind and support.**
3. You may have been asked **why we are looking at these issues now.** The rationale was laid out in our [January 12 email](#):
 - o We believe our current housing system has many strengths, and that there are some areas where we can do better. Rather than impose a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach, students need to help drive solutions that best fit their communities.

- We are concerned about rejection, undue stress, and lack of agency experienced by a number of students due to room-assignment and move-in processes used in some residence halls that are based on mutual selection and forced moves.
4. **You may have also been asked how we know that these two issues are problems.** Around 25 percent of respondents to the [2017 Student Quality of Life survey](#) (administered every four years) reported that their residence hall's in-house room-assignment process was a source of stress. Also, in the 2018 Orientation survey (administered in September) about 40 percent of 250 survey respondents described the process negatively. This was reinforced in the 2018 First Year Residential Experience (Post-REX) survey (administered in October), where more than 40 percent of over 500 respondents described the in-house room selection process negatively, saying it was stressful, overwhelming or tiring, chaotic or confusing, or hectic or frantic. **If we take this information at face value, we believe we can do better.**

Beyond these data, in the past several years, MIT's Corporation, through **DSL's Visiting Committee, has called for these processes to be evaluated and improved.** The role of the visiting committee is to ask administrative leaders to reflect upon a department's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. **But we know any modifications will be more effective if we work on them together.**

After the workshop, Cindy and I will meet individually with each house team and Exec to discuss which of your ideas can be implemented in the short term, how the effectiveness of those ideas will be assessed, and what might need more time to be evaluated and implemented.

This is a challenging task for many reasons. I know that we can find ways to address these concerns while maintaining the most meaningful and unique aspects of our house system. Cindy and I are grateful for your leadership and partnership!

Best regards,
Suzy