



## GRADUATE STUDENT HOUSING WORKING GROUP: ANNUAL UPDATE Fall 2019

### GENERAL OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS

In response to the recommendations set forth in the Graduate Student Housing Working Group's Report to the Chancellor (August 2018), Housing and Residential Services (HRS) has worked diligently to improve the residential experience for MIT's graduate student community. Working closely with the Graduate Housing Implementation Team as well as the graduate heads of house and house executive officers, HRS has advanced enhancements to housing policies and processes for 2019–2020 aimed at making living on campus more attractive to students. Efforts have included building student awareness of housing options available at MIT; increasing student agency in deciding when they arrive, as well as where and with whom they would like to live; helping students who want MIT housing to secure it in a shorter timeline; and creating transparency in terms of housing options and availability.

### **AUGUST 2018 GRADUATE HOUSING WORKING GROUP KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. MIT should increase on-campus graduate housing capacity with an optimal mix of unit types aligning with the evolving needs of students and families over time. The Institute should assess the feasibility of doing so in a way that breaks even financially at 30 years with comprehensive stewardship.
2. The Institute should identify ways to operate our housing differently. Currently our revenue falls short of what is required for comprehensive stewardship. This leads to lower quality housing and creates an impediment to adding more housing.
3. The Institute should develop a process for evaluating the benefits and detriments of changes to our housing policies.
4. A detailed evaluation of graduate student housing should be conducted by a similar working group every three years, with a report to Academic Council and the MIT Faculty. This should also include a short yearly update to assess progress relative to the last detailed evaluation.

This report fulfills the annual reporting expectation in recommendation 4 and addresses progress by the Implementation Team on recommendations 2 and 3.

### **IMPLEMENTATION TEAM**

The implementation team includes students from the Graduate Housing Working Group, housing assignments staff, and heads of house. It has been assembled to:

1. Examine the feasibility of recommendations from the Graduate Housing Working Group to improve the student housing experience; increase student participation in the on-campus housing allocation process; and consider ways to increase and/or more fully utilize the capacity of existing MIT graduate housing;
2. Set goals and timelines for implementation of attainable changes;
3. Work closely with heads of house and house governments to explore potential pilot programs and possible changes to housing policies/procedures;
4. Assess the effectiveness of implemented changes; and
5. Update the Graduate Housing Working Group, the Graduate Student Council, and the Chancellor on progress.

## POLICY AND PROCEDURAL CHANGES

MIT has piloted several new initiatives and has made adjustments to management policies and procedures for graduate student housing. These pilots and changes are intended to make the best use of existing resources and be responsive to graduate students' needs.

### Policy Changes

- **Renewable Licenses:** In the past, new single students received a license agreement for one year, and if they wanted to continue in on-campus housing, they had to enter the housing allocation process again. As of the 2019–2020 academic year, new single graduate students receive one-year licenses with the option to renew for a second year. Students with families always received a one-year license with the option to renew for a second year. The offer was not extended to new residents in Eastgate (because the building will close in August 2020) and in the Warehouse (because the building is for first-year graduate students only).
- **License Agreement Date Change:** In an effort to make more apartments available earlier in August and to better align with off-campus housing practices, HRS has adjusted housing license agreement dates. Starting in 2020, license end-dates will move from August 15 to July 31, which will allow students to arrive earlier and settle in before orientation and other programs begin. This shift will also help to alleviate the compressed time-period in late August when final building preparations are underway and new residents are arriving.
- **Rental Rates:** In response to the Graduate Housing Working Group Report's second recommendation, HRS worked with a consultant to analyze MIT housing rates and better understand how they relate to the Cambridge/Boston rental market. The analysis showed that all of MIT's graduate residences are below market, and some unit types are significantly further below market. Based on this analysis and the working group findings that area peer institutions price their graduate housing according to rental market trends, MIT is developing a new strategy to address these variations and achieve a more consistent and rational relationship to the market while endeavoring to keep rates below market. As a first step, rates were increased for 2019-2020 at different levels across each unit type in the graduate housing portfolio. The weighted average increase was 4.3% with a range of increases between 3.5-5.6% depending on unit type and its relationship to the market. It will take time to achieve a consistent relationship to the market. HRS continues to work with the Graduate Housing Implementation Team to discuss this strategy along with improvements to policies, procedures, and technology to make living in MIT housing even more attractive to graduate students.
- **Background on Stipends and Recent Initiatives to Support Students:** Each year the Graduate Student Council (GSC) Graduate Stipend Committee works with the Office of the Vice Chancellor (OVC) and the MIT administration to recommend changes in stipends for students supported by Research Assistantships, Teaching Assistantships, and fellowships. These changes typically reflect year-to-year changes in the local cost of living for graduate students. While these processes are effective for ensuring that the financial needs of the majority of graduate students are met, they are not always sufficient for addressing the needs of students who have limited income because they are on partial appointments, or those who have high costs due to having children. Therefore, following this year's stipend review, each School committed to implement new policies and practices to better address the needs of doctoral students on partial support. The OVC is currently working with the Provost and the School deans to implement these new policies and practices. In addition to this, the Graduate Family Support Working Group recently recommended a portable family grant to help address the needs of students with children. The

OVC is in discussions with the Provost and the School deans about implementing such a program.

### Pilot Initiatives

- **Expanded Couples Options:** Select efficiencies and one-bedroom units were offered to couples in traditionally singles-only buildings. A successful pilot for the 2018-2019 academic year was expanded for 2019-2020. In 2018-2019, 23 units were made available and filled in Sidney Pacific, Edgerton, and 70 Amherst. Ninety-four couples ranked these buildings in their top-three choices. For 2019-2020, 33 spaces were made available and filled in Sidney Pacific, Edgerton and 70 Amherst. Eighty-three couples ranked these buildings in their top-three choices for living on-campus.
- **Expanded Single Student Options:** Single students were offered Westgate efficiencies since they were not filling with couples as a family-only building. In 2019-2020, 41 single students were housed in Westgate. The demand from single students is strong, with 69 single graduate students listing Westgate efficiency in their top-three choices compared to 19 couples listing Westgate efficiency in their top-three choices.
- **Roommate Groups:** In 2018-2019, 80 groups applied and were accommodated as part of a pilot initiative. In 2019-2020, 144 groups applied and 49 were accommodated.

### Procedural Changes

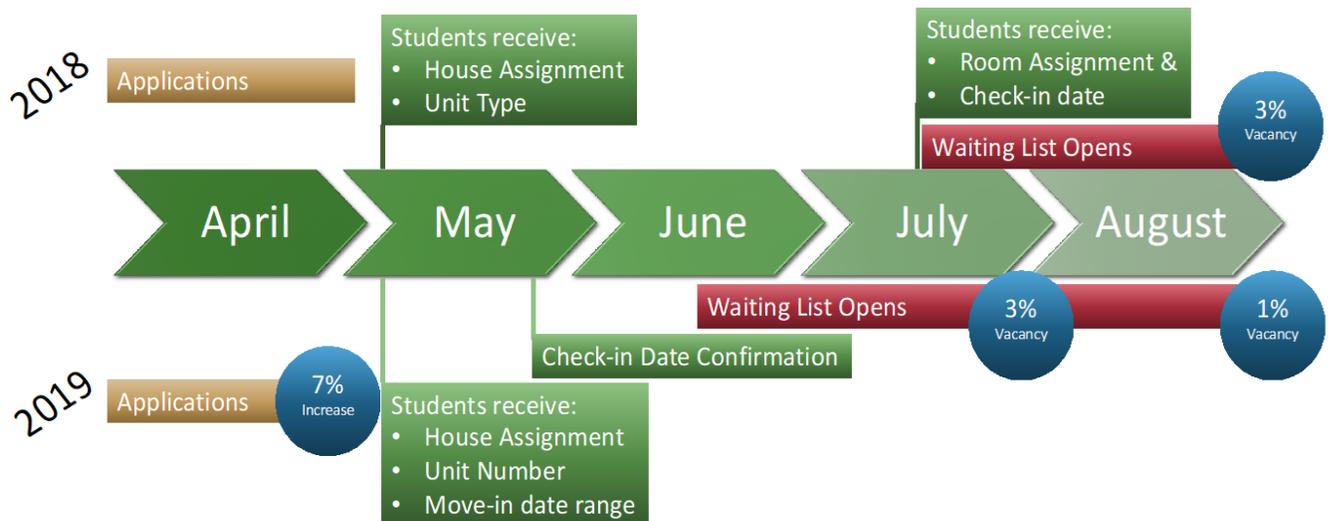
- **Marketing and Outreach:** For the fall 2019 Graduate Housing Allocation, HRS improved outreach to new and off-campus graduate students regarding the availability of on-campus housing options. Students received emails encouraging them to apply for housing and highlighting the benefits of on-campus living such as affordable rent inclusive of utilities, cable, and internet access. As a result, graduate housing applications increased by 7%. This increase allowed more students to be accommodated during the first two rounds of the allocation.
- **First-Round Allocation Accelerated Timeline (April–May):** HRS accelerated the timing of confirming room assignments and move-in dates. In the past, students who applied for housing by the first deadline of April 30 would find out in May whether they received on-campus housing and if they received the room type they desired. They would not receive details about their specific room or move-in date until July. Students stated that receiving assignment information in July did not allow them enough time to adequately purchase travel or personal items. The 2018 Graduate Housing Satisfaction Survey showed that 58% of residents were satisfied with the timing of assignment information (see survey summary below), which pointed to the need for improvement. For fall 2019, students received room-assignments and move-in date ranges with their housing allocation results the first week of May, and they received their exact move-in date on May 30.
- **Second-Round Allocation Open to All Students (May–June):** An important procedural change for fall 2019 was opening a second round of the Graduate Housing Allocation to all eligible graduate students who did not have housing. In the past, this second-round allocation was open only to students who did not obtain housing in the first round. This change was particularly beneficial to students who were accepted to their graduate programs after the first round was closed.
- **Self-Selection Waiting List:** HRS piloted a new self-selection system for the housing waiting list, which offered greater transparency about available units and increased student agency to select on-campus housing more quickly. Previously, students and other MIT-affiliated visitors<sup>1</sup> had to

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<sup>1</sup> More information on MIT-affiliated visitors can be found on the [MIT DSL Housing for Visitors website](#).

wait until mid-July to enter the waiting list, and they would receive housing offers starting in August. The manual process of assigning individuals from the waiting list was time-consuming: for every vacancy, HRS staff would extend an offer to someone on the waiting list manually with a reasonable deadline by which to accept or decline the assignment. Staff had to wait for the individual to decline the assignment or for the deadline to pass before extending an offer to another person who wanted that unit type. Beginning June 17, 2019, students could log into the HRS housing management system, view available units, and make housing selections from the listings of available units based on their dates of availability. Those choosing housing were then rent-responsible starting with the date that the unit was available to them. This change filled units much more rapidly and gave students the ability to secure housing more quickly. Units filled so rapidly that the waiting list process was paused at the end of August when we reached full capacity.

## Accelerated Housing Timeline



### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

#### Occupancy Information

Key indicators related to occupancy are the vacancy rate at the start of an academic year (as of October 15 when the Institute reports official student enrollment numbers) and the annualized vacancy rate that accounts for occupancy throughout the entire fiscal year (July 1 to June 30). As a result of enhancements to policies and procedures described above, HRS saw improvements in both October and annualized occupancy numbers.

*October Vacancy:* The October 15, 2019 housing vacancy rate was 1% compared to 3% on October 15, 2018. These measures have resulted in MIT housing more graduate students in existing on-campus housing.

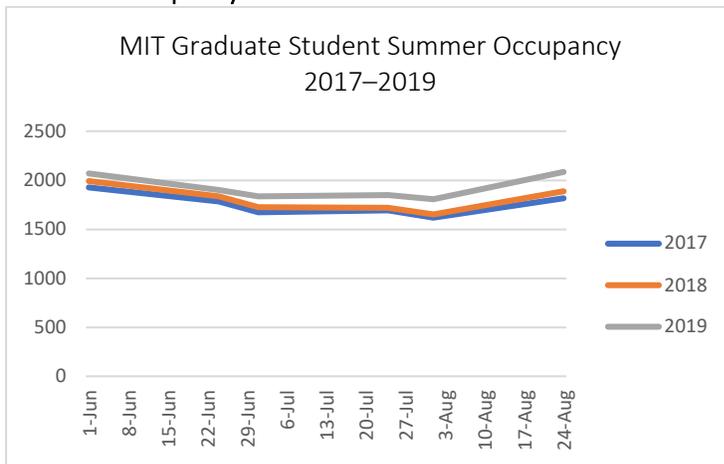
*Annualized Vacancy:* HRS has continued to decrease the overall vacancy rate this year. The annualized FY19 vacancy rate of 10% is down from 12.8% in FY18 and 15.1% in FY17. HRS will be assessing the effects of the numerous changes to graduate housing processes (e.g., changes to license agreement dates), which are expected to improve the higher summer vacancy rate that is ultimately driving the overall vacancy rate.

## Fall Occupancy

Year (October 15)	Total Occupancy (2453 Capacity)		Grad Students		UG Students		Non-Students (Post Docs/Visitors)	
2019	2428	99%	2312	95%	71	3%	45	2%
2018	2390	97%	2190	92%	67	3%	133	6%
2017	2310	94%	2114	92%	98	4%	98	4%

Source: DSL HRS Housing Management System as of October 15, 2019 at 11:00 pm

## Summer Occupancy



Summer 2019 occupancy rates are higher than at the same points in summer 2018 and summer 2017.

## Allocation Data

Spring applications for the fall 2019 housing allocation increased with a total of 1,556 MIT students applying to one of two rounds. Through the allocation, 98% of new graduate student applicants received a housing offer for the 2019-2020 year. Through the two rounds of the allocation, HRS offered on-campus housing to 1,038 new and returning students.

Efficiency and shared two-bedroom apartments continue to be the most popular choices for single graduate students. Single graduate students also rank single bedrooms in the 70 Amherst Street residence over a 4-bedroom apartment in any building. Within family housing available to couples and graduate students with children, one-bedroom apartments are the highest in demand.

Not all students who are offered housing through the allocation decide to accept it, and other students who have renewed their housing choose to cancel it after the allocation has been run. These spaces are offered to students and MIT-affiliated visitors through the waiting-list process, with priority given to MIT students. In 2019, 472 MIT students and 327 MIT-affiliated visitors applied to the waiting list. The fall waiting list closed on October 11, and 207 people were housed through this process. Over 350 people remained on the list at the close of the process.

## Student Demographics

		2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
School	Graduate Level	Enrolled by Y-Report: 6,695	Has HMS assignment: 2,110	Enrolled by Y-Report: 6,742	Has HMS assignment: 2,179	Enrolled by Y-Report: 6,780	Has HMS assignment: 2,262
ENG	DOC	31%	36%	31%	37%	31%	36%
	SM	15%	19%	15%	19%	15%	17%
	Total	46%	55%	46%	56%	46%	53%
MGMT	DOC	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%
	SM	20%	17%	20%	15%	21%	16%
	Total	22%	20%	23%	18%	23%	19%
SAP	DOC	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%
	SM	7%	6%	7%	7%	6%	7%
	Total	10%	7%	9%	8%	9%	9%
SCI	DOC	17%	16%	17%	15%	17%	15%
	SM	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Total	17%	16%	18%	15%	17%	15%
SHASS	DOC	4%	2%	4%	2%	4%	3%
	SM	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%
	Total	4%	3%	4%	3%	4%	4%
<b>Total</b>		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Enrollment Source: Annual Y-Report for all regular registered graduate students, maintained by Office of the Registrar

Living in Graduate Housing Source: Housing Management System

## FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

In recent months, many renovations have been completed in graduate houses:

- **70 Amherst Street (E2):** Fifth and sixth floors were renovated and opened to graduate students for the 2018-2019 academic year.
- **Ashdown House (NW35):** Hardwood flooring was replaced in the Hulsizer Room.
- **Eastgate Apartments (E55):** Lobby desk area was repaired and reorganized, and a new television was installed in the 29th floor lounge.
- **Edgerton House (NW10):** An IS&T network upgrade was completed and new lounge furniture was installed.
- **Sidney-Pacific (NW86):** Projectors, screens, and sound systems were replaced in the Multipurpose Room and Seminar Room.
- **Tang Hall (W84):** Kitchens, baths, living room carpeting, and curtains were updated in 90 apartments.
- **Westgate Apartments (W85):** A new television and sound system was installed in the basement lounge; cabinet and counter renovations were completed in select apartments (based on vacancy); and a new water heater was installed for the building.
- **Warehouse (NW30):** New study tables and power outlets were installed in the second floor Mezzanine lounge, and tables and upholstered chairs were added to study rooms on the third and fourth floors.

## NEW BUILDING PROGRESS AND TRANSITION PLANNING

### Graduate Tower (E39) in Kendall Square

The new graduate tower in Kendall Square is expected to open in August 2020, replacing the 200 units in Eastgate and expanding on-campus occupancy by 254 additional efficiency apartments. Building E39 will include MIT Admissions, the MIT Forum, ground-floor retail space, a childcare center, two floors of academic office space, and a tower providing a total of 454 housing units (two-bedroom, one-bedroom, and efficiencies) for MIT graduate students. The housing tower will be anchored by a three-level “podium” that provides a host of common areas including quiet study spaces, a family lounge, a playroom, terraces, and multipurpose rooms for residents.

### Transition Team

As MIT prepares to open the graduate tower in Kendall Square and close the Eastgate Apartments, a transition team has been created to plan for these changes.

The transition team includes current residents of Eastgate, Graduate Student Council leadership, graduate students at large, Eastgate’s head of house, a faculty representative, and staff from the Division of Student Life (DSL), including HRS. The transition team will work collaboratively to develop plans that focus on the following key issues:

- Closure of Eastgate: Developing information about on- and off-campus housing options that can help to meet current Eastgate residents’ needs; ensuring that residents are informed regarding their options and receive priority in on-campus processes; and planning for move-out logistics.
- Opening of the Graduate Tower: Developing new executive team membership, roles, and responsibilities; communicating information about apartment types, prices, and amenities; planning for common spaces in the Graduate Tower; and planning move-in logistics.
- Communication: Ensuring strong communication with residents and soliciting input from key constituents.

## OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING

The Off-Campus Housing Office within HRS connects students and MIT community members to resources that help them meet their housing needs. It provides assistance with topics such as navigating the Boston/Cambridge real estate market, learning tenant’s rights, reviewing applications and leases, finding temporary housing resources, and providing rental references to former residents of MIT graduate housing.

The off-campus housing website ([mitoffcampus.com](http://mitoffcampus.com)) allows MIT community members to create accounts, search housing listings, view roommate profiles, connect with real estate agents or brokers, and more. The website includes a filter option that enables searches for properties from MIT affiliates, as well as for listings that are free of any fees.

Since the website’s launch in January 2016:

- 7,964 MIT students, 1,630 MIT-affiliated visitors, and 2,044 faculty/staff have registered as users
- 8,884 properties have been listed
- The website has seen 241,140 visits and 1,843,702 views

## SUMMARY OF 2018 GRADUATE HOUSING SATISFACTION SURVEY

In November 2018, HRS conducted a survey of residents living in MIT's graduate houses. The survey went to 2,387 residents who were living on campus at the time, and 971 responded (a 41% response rate). This was the first survey of its type administered to the graduate housing population. A brief survey will be administered in fall 2019, repeating key questions from the November 2018 survey.

The purpose of the 2018 survey was to assess satisfaction with MIT's graduate housing and the residence hall pilot programs mentioned above. To accomplish these goals, the survey was designed to capture feedback in the following areas:

- Satisfaction with Housing Assignments
  - Assess the room-assignment and move-in processes
  - Assess facility management, including communication, and timeliness and quality of work
  - Assess safety/security and community experience
- Satisfaction with Pilot Programs
  - Assess experiences in the following pilot programs:
    - Singles in Family Housing
    - Couples in Single Housing
    - Roommate selection

A snapshot of the 2018 Survey of MIT Graduate Housing Residents survey results are below; to see a more detailed summary, please visit <https://studentlife.mit.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/2018-Graduate-Housing-Satisfaction-Overall-Results.pdf>.

### Overall Experience

- 81% of respondents are very satisfied or satisfied with their housing experience

### Assignment Process

- 90% agree or strongly agree that they are satisfied with their choice to live on campus
- 62% are very satisfied or satisfied with the application process to get on-campus housing
- 58% are very satisfied or satisfied with the length of time it took between getting their building assignment and their actual room assignment
- 75% are very satisfied or satisfied with the room assignment they did receive
- 41% are very satisfied or satisfied with their roommate assignment

### Move-In Experience

- 84% agree or strongly agree that the move in process was easy
- 69% agree or strongly agree that their room was clean when they moved in

### Residential Experience

- 72% agree or strongly agree that they felt welcomed into their community
- 70% agree or strongly agree that they feel supported in their community
- 71% agree or strongly agree that they have friends in their community
- 61% agree or strongly agree that they feel a connection to their residential community
- 61% agree or strongly agree that they feel like they belong in their community

**Pilot Program- Couples in Single Housing**

- 83% agree or strongly agree they were satisfied with the number of buildings available for couples
- 92% agree or strongly agree that they enjoy living in an adults-only community

**Pilot Program- Roommates**

- 72% agree or strongly agree they were satisfied with the number of building options available for roommates
- 86% agree or strongly agree they were satisfied with the ability to apply for housing with roommate(s)

**Pilot Program- Singles in Westgate**

- 41% agree or strongly agree they are satisfied living in a community with children
- 53% agree or strongly agree they feel connected to their residential community

This newly administered graduate housing survey has established baseline numbers on these key areas. A fall 2019 survey of all new residents in graduate housing is being administered to measure changes since 2018. HRS, working with the Graduate Housing Implementation Team, heads of house, house governments, and other constituents, will continue to assess the effectiveness of the changes outlined in this report and will report on them annually as recommended in the 2018 Graduate Housing Working Group Report.