

Date: January 12, 2019

Subject: Room assignment and move-in process design exercise, plans for IAP/spring

tl;dr: design exercise details outlined; IAP engagement opportunities; faculty panel, focus sessions, and student workshop set for spring term.

Dear residence hall leaders,

Thank you for working with us this past fall and thinking about ways to improve the room assignment and move-in processes. Your insights and leadership reinforce the many strengths of house life at MIT and make us even more optimistic that we can build on the positive, while addressing the not-so-positive aspects of the residential experience.

Since September, we have had many conversations with students, Heads of House, faculty and campus leaders, and we have learned a lot. Students have told us they want safe halls, a sense of community where they live, a close group of friends, and a smooth and supportive transition for students during move-in. Students have acknowledged that some can be hurt by forced moves and the rejection that can result from mutual selection; that the houses' move-in experiences can vary and can be stressful; and that the room assignment chair position is a time- and labor-intensive role.

We believe our shared goal is to offer students the best residential experience possible. With help from many of you, we have developed a plan for advancing our work over IAP and into the spring term. **Here are the activities that we've been talking about, as well as a timeline for continued dialogue, that you can share with your incoming presidents, room assignment chairs, and entire community (more details, including guidance, times, and locations, follow at the end of this email):**

- Design exercise: January – February (short summary emails submitted by February 25 to roomassignments@mit.edu)
- Office hours with Cindy and Suzy: January 18 and January 24
- First-year student focus group sessions hosted by DormCon, the UA, and DSL: January – early February
- Faculty panel: Thursday, February 7
- Student workshop: Saturday, March 2
- Individual house meetings with Cindy and Suzy to discuss the feedback from the workshop and next steps on potential changes for the fall: March

Before you dive into the details below, we want to highlight two key points: ***First, that the design exercise outlined here is a milestone in this process, not the endpoint.*** At the workshop and then again in follow-up meetings with each house in March, we

plan to have conversations with you about your designs, including what might be gained or lost by implementing them and how they might be constructed to maximize the many positive outcomes of house life at MIT, while minimizing the negative aspects.

Second, we know that the room assignment and move-in processes vary for each community and, accordingly, the design exercise will apply to houses in different ways – some more than others. We ask that houses that do not have to propose changes still engage with us by reflecting on and evaluating their current practices, and then considering whether there are ways to improve them.

Community-building, engagement with peers, and opportunities for exploration and fun should continue to be hallmarks of MIT's residential experience. We are here to help as you work with your community on these next steps, and we are looking forward to working together on this. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,
Cindy and Suzy

AT-A-GLANCE SUMMARY & SCHEDULE

Design Exercise: January – February; Short summary emails submitted to roomassignments@mit.edu by February 25

Objectives and Requirements

We would like you to enlist members of your community in a design exercise to create a move-in and room assignment process that is supportive of all students, relatively stress-free, and efficient. Your designs should embrace and reflect the spirit of "One MIT" – we aspire to be a community that is welcoming to all.

When finding a place to live in our residence halls, at any point during a student's time on campus, we do not want students to experience rejection because they were judged and ultimately not selected by other students. We also do not want students to experience the negative outcomes that can accompany forced moves, such as unnecessary stress, lack of agency, and not feeling welcomed in their summer-assigned community. **To achieve this, your designs must satisfy two requirements:**

- 1. Upper-level students will not preference or select who will live on their floor/entry/community.**
- 2. New students will not be forced to move from the room assigned to them over the summer.**

The goal is to come up with design ideas that meet these objectives and requirements. We would like you to describe your proposed changes, and then explain how you believe they meet the above criteria, in a short email that can be sent to roomassignments@mit.edu on or before February 25. These emails will be a starting point to help guide our conversation at the March 2 student workshop. The workshop will be an opportunity for you to continue to refine your designs, as well as receive feedback on them.

Participants

In the fall of 2018, as house presidents, you were actively involved in conversations with us on improving the move-in and room assignment processes. We appreciate that you've agreed to continue leading discussions in your communities, and will enlist newly elected presidents, room assignment chairs, and more residents who are interested in participating. Your Head(s) of House, Area Director, and MIT Housing will also be available for guidance (see more in "Resources" below).

Possible ways to approach drafting redesigned room assignments and move-in processes

This fall, some students workshopped different algorithms for room assignments, while others looked at their processes from a student-house interaction perspective. One student idea included communicating more clearly – perhaps through online mediums and webinars – each community's interests, values, and expectations so that new students can make more informed choices about where they want to live. Another suggestion was to improve the housing preference form so that it provided more in-depth information about incoming students' housing preferences, which would lead to better initial assignments.

Resources

If you need access to resources to inform your draft design (e.g., access to someone who can run multiple algorithms on past preferences; first-year summer rooming questionnaire data; facilitator for a focus group), please reach out to [Jen Hapgood-White](#), Director of Residential Services, and [Jag Patel](#), Senior Director of Special Projects, Office of the Chancellor. They would be happy to assist you. Other possible resources to consider: [Don Camelio](#), Associate Dean, Residential Education; [Judy Robinson](#), Senior Associate Dean, Residential Education; and your Head(s) of House and members of your house teams are all available to help leading up to the submission deadline and student workshop.

Feedback: Office hours with Cindy and Suzy on January 18 and January 24

We have office hours set up on January 18 from 12-2 p.m. and January 24 from 11 a.m.-12 p.m. (location: 4-110) to discuss the design exercise. You may also contact us to set up individual meetings for feedback on your drafts.

First-year student focus group sessions: January – early February

Nonye Ikeanyi, DormCon President, suggested that we host a few focus group sessions to add to our understanding of first-year students' residential experience. In partnership with DormCon and the UA, DSL is in the process of setting these sessions up over IAP, where students will be identified randomly and invited to join us for a meal and to share their insights. We will prepare a summary of findings from these sessions for you.

Faculty Panel: Thursday, February 7; 4:30 p.m.; 10-250

In the fall, we discussed organizing a faculty panel conversation to help the MIT community better understand what is known about how social groups, organizations, and communities welcome or exclude members, and how sub-groups emerge and interact within and between groups. Please hold Thursday, February 7 at 4:30 p.m. on your calendars (location: 10-250). We will share additional details, including the names of the panelists, as soon as we can.

The panel and audience conversation will not focus specifically on the design exercise or current room assignment and move-in practices but rather on more general knowledge about groups, organizations, and communities.

Student Workshop: Saturday, March 2

After submitting your brief draft design exercise email to roomassignments@mit.edu on or before February 25, we will hold a student workshop on Saturday, March 2 (exact location and time are TBD).

Houses will send outgoing and incoming house presidents and room assignment chairs to the workshop as their delegates. Student facilitators (please see list below) will be assigned to each community to assist the group in refining their ideas so the design is consistent with the aforementioned criteria:

Designs should summarize your community's ideas for creating a move-in and room assignment process that is supportive of all students, relatively stress-free, and efficient. Designs should embrace and reflect the spirit of "One MIT" – we aspire to be a campus that is welcoming to all. Your designs must also satisfy two requirements:

1. Upper-level students will not preference or select who will live on their floor/entry/community.

2. New students will not be forced to move from the room assigned to them over the summer.

While we will continue to work with the student facilitators to finalize the workshop format, the overarching goal is to present and listen to new ideas, to weigh pros and cons, and to provide feedback to the design teams. Each house may work independently with their facilitator in the morning, discussing and refining their design ideas; then, over lunch, houses will share their thinking and enlist the feedback of guest participants who may include Heads of House, Area Directors, administrators, and other student leaders.

Workshop Facilitators

[Darius A Bopp](#), Maseeh

[Katie Fisher](#), Burton Conner

[Serena Grown-Haeberli](#), Simmons

[Nonye Ikeanyi](#), Burton Conner

[Tesla Wells](#), East Campus

[Eleanor R Wintersteen](#), MacGregor