



# NEW VASSAR

UNDERGRADUATE RESIDENCE HALL

FOUNDERS'  
GROUP INTERIM  
REPORT  
JANUARY 31, 2020

# NEW VASSAR

## FOUNDERS' GROUP INTERIM REPORT

January 31, 2020

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## Introduction

There is much excitement and anticipation about the August 2020 opening of the New Vassar residence hall, MIT's newest undergraduate living community. A Founders' Group was formed in October 2019 to lay the foundation for the community that this residence hall will become. The group was appointed by Vice President and Dean for Student Life, Suzy Nelson, who provided a charge to guide its work. This interim report details the Founders' Group efforts through January 31, 2020.

## Founders' Group Overview

### Forming the Founders' Group

The New Vassar Founders' Group is co-chaired by Professor Steven Hall, appointed as Head of House for New Vassar and Judy Robinson, Senior Associate Dean for Residential Education. Several MIT students and staff members also serve on the Founders' Group (see list below). To identify student members, a letter was sent to all Heads of House and Assistant Directors of Residential Life soliciting nominations. A similar letter was sent to Student Life staff and student leaders of the Undergraduate Association, DormCon, Class Councils, Interfraternity Council and the Panhellenic Council. Announcements were also placed in *The Tech* and on electronic bulletin boards.

Students submitted interest forms and were interviewed by a small team of Founders' Group members: Steve Hall, Judy Robinson, Naomi Carton, and Don Camelio. Six students were invited to join the Founders' Group, with the understanding that they will move into New Vassar when it opens and be its first student leadership group.

To identify Graduate Resident Advisors to serve on the Founders' Group and on its house team, a letter was sent to all GRAs soliciting interest. One GRA was selected to serve. Additionally, an Assistant/Area Director was selected, and they will transfer in the fall from their current residence hall community to New Vassar.

The complete list of Founders' Group members is below.

### New Vassar Founders' Group 2019-2020

Ololade Abdulai, Class of 2023, Burton Conner  
Vayun Alapati, Class of 2022, Burton Conner, EECS  
Annalisa Broski, Class of 2022, Baker House, EECS  
Don Camelio, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Residential Life  
John Ross Campbell, Assistant Director, Residential Life/Area Director  
Naomi Carton, New Vassar Associate Head of House; Associate Dean, Graduate Residential Life  
David Friedrich, Senior Associate Dean, Housing and Residential Services  
Steven Hall, New Vassar Head of House, Professor, Aeronautics and Astronautics (co-chair)  
Richard Hilton, Director of House Operations, Housing and Residential Services  
Tahmid Jamal, Class of 2023, Next House

Somiya Kalloo, Assistant Dean for Academic Programs, Office of Minority Education  
Emily Larsen, Class of 2022, Maseeh Hall, Biological Engineering (joined December 2019)  
Sophia Liu, Graduate Resident Advisor, Health Sciences and Technology, Former UA President  
Tina (Tingyi) Lu, Class of 2023, McCormick Hall  
Kate McCarthy, Associate Dean, Student Support and Wellbeing  
Jennifer Meredith, Staff to the Founders' Group, Senior Administrative Assistant  
Suzy Nelson, Vice President and Dean for Student Life (ex-officio)  
Oomi Pammitt, Class of 2023, Simmons Hall (resigned January 2020)  
Judy Robinson, Senior Associate Dean, Residential Education (co-chair)

## Founders' Group Vision and Charge

### Vision Statement

We will found a caring, respectful, and inclusive community, where any student can live and thrive on any floor.

### Charge and Living Community Goals

Guided by the vision for the New Vassar residence hall, the Founders' Group will create and sustain a living-learning community that helps students to unlock their full potential, both academically and personally; to cultivate new friendships and positive relationships with faculty, staff and peers; to further a diverse, equitable, and inclusive living climate; to develop a healthy and well-balanced lifestyle; and to explore their sense of purpose and passion for lifelong learning and discovery.

The group's work will account for the following:

- The New Vassar residence hall will be home to a brand new community and will not serve as a "swing dorm."
- The New Vassar residence hall will be a dining community, where residents are required to participate in the meal plan program.
- Room-assignment policies in the New Vassar residence hall will advance the vision to create an inclusive and open community, where any student is welcome to live on any floor.

### Expected Outcomes

The group will be responsible for the following deliverables:

- Establish community values to serve as a foundation for an inclusive, welcoming, and supportive community where any student can live and thrive on any floor;
- Develop a system of shared governance that promotes teamwork, accountability and collaboration between the house team, Division of Student Life (DSL) and residents;
- Develop a framework for house peer-mentoring and student life and learning programs that advance residents' physical and mental health and that supports their academic success during their transition to college as well as throughout their entire time in the community;
- Engage in furniture selection and planning of communal spaces; and

- Identify strategies for involving faculty in house life and promoting learning by making and collaborating:
  - This work will focus in part on ways to foster connections between the New Vassar makerspace and the Metropolitan Storage Warehouse makerspace.
  - This work will focus in part on developing strategies for how the dining hall, marketplace, and community kitchen will benefit the New Vassar residents and the MIT community.

### Expectations for Founders' Group Members

- Members are expected to attend all meetings.
- Members will be responsible for soliciting community input on New Vassar programs and initiatives.
- Members will develop the following documents to be shared with members of the MIT community:
  - An interim report by January 31, 2020
  - A final report and recommendations by June 1, 2020

### Meeting Structure

The Founders' Group held its first meeting on October 24, 2019, and met every two weeks through the fall semester. The group also met three times over IAP in January 2020.



*First Founders' Group Meeting—October 24, 2019  
Flowers Dining Room, Maseeh Hall*

## Agendas

Meeting agendas and discussion topics were guided by the goals and intended outcomes and prioritized based on the timeline for making decisions. During the first meeting, guest presenter Dennis Collins, Director of Capital Renewal and Renovation for Housing and Residential Services, provided an overview of New Vassar.

With staff from Campus Planning and the project architects, the Founders' Group viewed renderings of the building and site to better inform decisions around programs and operations.

## Site Tours

The Founders' Group had the opportunity to do a site tour on November 19, 2019. The group walked through the facility, seeing the layout of student rooms, the dining facility, and common spaces (e.g. exercise space, entries, maker space).

A second site tour will be scheduled in the spring semester 2020.



*Members of the New Vassar Founders' Group  
First Site Tour—November 19, 2019*

## Subcommittees

At the end of the fall semester the group agreed that it will be helpful to establish subcommittees to advance its progress. Three subcommittees have been formed: Wellbeing efforts, promoting New Vassar to upper level students, and welcoming first year students to the community. The following are the specific charges for each subcommittee.

### Subcommittee Charges

#### *Wellbeing efforts*

Co-leads: Naomi Carton and Kate McCarthy

The wellbeing subcommittee will draft a plan to promote wellbeing in New Vassar that will be the foundation for future programming and environmental efforts moving forward. For 2020-2021, the plan may include:

- Special programs related to wellbeing and wellness (e.g. mental health, nutrition, career development, spiritual development, physical health, emotional wellbeing, resilience, self-care)
- Wellbeing and wellness signage and messaging throughout the residence hall
- Holding DAPER physical education and wellness courses in New Vassar
- A residents' wellbeing committee, possibly comprised of peer mentors, to advance programming efforts
- An assessment plan to determine impact and student response

This subcommittee will need to work with staff focused on wellbeing as part of their campus role, as well as DAPER Physical Education and Wellness Directors.

#### *Promoting New Vassar to Upper Level Students*

Co-leads: Jennifer Meredith and John Ross Campbell

The promoting New Vassar subcommittee will draft a plan to promote the residence hall to upper level students before the switch lottery. The plan may include:

- Tours or virtual tours of New Vassar
- FAQs about New Vassar targeting upper level students
- Communications to upper-level students about the room assignment process
- Messaging an emphasis on wellbeing and on making
- A timeline for the promotional campaign

This subcommittee will need to work with communications specialists in HRS and DSL.

#### *Welcoming First-Year Students (CPW, REX, Welcome Week)*

Co-leads: Steve Hall and Don Camelio

The welcoming first-year students subcommittee will draft a plan to introduce first-year students to New Vassar, including:

- Programming during the 2020 CPW
- I3 video development
- REX activities (and students to coordinate REX events) that align with the first-year student room assignment process

## Progress on Deliverables

### Shared Values

The Founders' Group began its work by developing core values that will be used to guide programmatic and operational decisions for the community. Following a group values exercise, the group agreed upon the following eight community values:

- Openness
- Wellbeing
- Inclusiveness
- Integrity
- Community
- Adventure
- Collaboration
- Kindness

The goal is to have the core values reflected in the Founders' Group work and throughout programmatic and operational activities. These values will also guide the ongoing development of the New Vassar community once the residence hall opens. Examples of ways in which these values will be operationalized include the following:

#### *Inclusiveness*

- New Vassar will develop traditions and events that are accessible to all students (e.g. financial considerations).
- Floor funds will be used for events that welcome this participation and not just a small group of residents.

#### *Wellbeing*

- Wellbeing efforts will be broad-based, addressing the many aspects of wellness (e.g. self-care, healthy eating, sleep).
- There will be positive messaging and signage about wellbeing throughout the residence hall.

#### *Adventure*

- The community can hold events, such as a scavenger hunt, that are fun and that serve as community-building activities.

### Shared Governance

To design the structure of the New Vassar house government, student members of the Founders' Group interviewed student leaders from all other undergraduate residence halls. Student members presented their summaries at a Founders' Group meeting and used this information to determine the structure of the new house government.

The proposed structure for New Vassar house government is in Appendix A.

Two outstanding tasks need to be completed in the spring semester. The first is to determine how representatives will be elected in the house and who has voting privileges. The Founders' Group supports a general election with representatives from throughout the house, but not representing specific floors or clusters.

The second outstanding task to confirm is the house tax for residents. The Founders' Group will likely propose a house tax of \$75 per resident for each semester (house taxes in other houses range from \$60-\$90 per resident for each semester).

## Student Life and Learning Programs

### Wellbeing programs

As noted above, a wellbeing subcommittee has been formed and it will draft a plan to promote wellbeing in New Vassar that will be the foundation for future programming and environmental efforts moving forward. Once the residence hall is open, the Founders' Group anticipates that a student wellness committee will be established.

### Maker space

New Vassar has a dedicated room to be used as a maker space. The Founders' Group has not yet begun its work on establishing the maker space, but will dedicate time in the spring semester to visit other campus maker spaces and develop a proposal for New Vassar's program. The target completion date for this part of the Founders' Group's work is April 2020.

### House Dining

Peter Cummings, Executive Director of DSL Administration, and Mark Hayes, Director of Dining, attended the November 7 Founders' Group meeting. Along with Naomi Carton, who works part-time in Dining Services, they discussed with the Founders' Group the possibilities for the New Vassar house dining program. Because New Vassar is a dining house, residents will be required to be on a meal plan. There are, however, options for students who also want to cook for themselves, including cooking pods, a country kitchen, and a marketplace where residents can purchase food items. These multiple aspects of the dining facility will provide unique opportunities in dining that can be aligned with the New Vassar wellbeing efforts.

The dining plan structure is under review for all of house dining, with final plans for 2020-2021 to be finalized in March 2020. Based on feedback from the Founders' Group, the proposal under discussion with Bon Appetit includes:

- Breakfast will be a "Pick 4" option in the marketplace.
- Brunch and dinner will be part of the dining program. Brunch will be offered from 9:30am – 2pm and dinner will be offered from 5:30pm – 9pm.

Bon Appetit is working on performas to determine costs for these option. If the cost presents a challenge, we will look at offering dining on a more traditional schedule.

Other operational issues to address in the spring are the hours for the marketplace and dining operations during semester breaks. These decisions will be driven, in part, by the needs and capacity of Dining Services.

In addition to participating in the dining plan, students will have the opportunity to learn to cook and learn valuable life skills through cooking experiences. Having flexibility through the marketplace, cooking pods, and the country kitchen, students will be able to purchase kits to cook their own meals. Additionally, it is proposed that the dining program offer the following:

- Programs that allow students to explore cooking in different cultures
- Cooking courses in the country kitchen
- Monthly community dinners
- Monthly nutrition and wellness cooking classes

## House Room Assignment Processes

### Upper Level Room Assignments

The subcommittee dedicated to promoting New Vassar to upper level students will propose a plan to be implemented in February 2020. The switch lottery will take place in March so it is important that a plan to garner upper level student interest be implemented in a timely way.

Because New Vassar does not yet have a Room Assignment Chair, the Founders' Group has agreed upon a plan for upper-level room assignments for the 2020-2021 year (see appendix B). In future years, the Room Assignment Chair will implement upper-level room assignments using a lottery system based on student preferences and in alignment with the room assignment guiding principles that state that mutual selection will not occur and that students will be given as much agency as possible in selecting their assignments.

### First-Year Room Assignments

The subcommittee on welcoming first-year students will develop a proposal for plans to introduce New Vassar to members of the Class of 2024. The plans will include programs during Campus Preview Weekend, Residential Exploration, and move-in. A house tour is scheduled for CPW 2020 so that potential new students and families can visit the residence hall.

The Founders' Group will confirm its plans for first-year student room assignment processes in the spring. The group has agreed to use a lottery system based on student preferences and it will align its process to the room assignment guiding principles that state that mutual selection will not occur and students will be given as much agency as possible in selecting their assignments. The Founders' Group will also discuss the process for first-year students to follow if they want to stay in their summer assigned rooms.

## GRA Selection

The Graduate Resident Advisor selection process is underway for all undergraduate residence halls. One GRA was hired for New Vassar when the Founders' Group was convened and the house team will select 11 additional GRAs through the traditional process. The Founders' Group has agreed on the following process to select its GRA staff:

- Prescreening interviews conducted by Residential Education began the week of January 13th and run through the end of the month. Naomi, John Ross, Kester, Don and Sophia (GRA) will take part in these interviews. The goal is for this group to prescreen as many as 60 potential applicants.
- On February 5th, Steven, Naomi and John Ross will review the overall pool and select a group of 30 candidates to move on to the next phase of the process.
- After February 5th, Steven, Naomi, John Ross, Sophia and students from the Founders' Group will conduct interviews and choose a group of 18-20 to engage in a meet-and-greet with the students and other Founders' Group members.
- Once this process is complete, Steven, Naomi and John Ross will make the final selections. This step will be completed by March 12th.
- From March 20th-27th, Residential Life will make offers to the applicants.
- By April 3<sup>rd</sup>, selected GRAs will have accepted positions and houses will be notified of their confirmation.

## Peer Mentoring

New Vassar will have a Resident Peer Mentor Program. Plans for the program and the selection process will be finalized in the spring semester.

## Involving Faculty in House Life

New Vassar will develop and implement programs that promote faculty engagement in house life. These efforts will include a residential scholar program. Plans for this program and for selecting a residential scholar will be finalized in the spring semester.

## Furniture Selection

Due to project timelines, student input on furniture options and final selection for New Vassar was completed before the Founders' Group was convened. However, the Founders' Group was able to provide input on fabric selections for furniture in the common space on the second floor of the residence hall.

## Meeting Plans and Timeline

See appendix C for a chart that details completed the Founders' Group meeting schedule and deliverables and tasks, as well as those that will be addressed in the spring semester 2020.

## Appendix A: Proposed New Vassar House Government

### New Vassar

#### House Government Overview

##### Officers and Executive Board

- Positions
  - President-External responsibilities
  - Vice President-Internal responsibilities
  - Treasurer
  - Secretary
  - Communications Manager
- Standing Committee Chairs
  - REX
  - CPW
  - Dining
  - Facilities
  - Maker Space
  - Wellness
  - Floors
  - Sustainability

##### Elections

- Elections will be held at the end of each fall semester, with position appointments running from January to January.
- All positions, including committee chairs, will be elected by popular vote by current residents.

##### Meeting Structure

- Officer meetings (open to all house residents)
- Town Hall meetings

##### Voting Structure

- Officers only or house wide voting (to be determined)
- The house constitution will include clarifying information about what type of issues can be voted on by the residents and what type of decisions are the MIT administration's purview

## Appendix B: New Vassar Upper Level Room Assignments

### Process and timeline

#### **Self-selection for New Vassar upper-level student assignments**

- Application Period: March 3, 2020 through March 23, 2020
- Room Selection Period: April 13, 2020 through April 16, 2020

#### **Identifying rooms available for self-selection**

Housing and Residential Services, along with student and staff representatives from the Founders' Group, will select which rooms are designated first-year rooms and which rooms will be available for upper-class students for the self-selection lottery.

- Review of floor plans
- Designation of first year rooms will be based on the priority to evenly distribute first-year rooms throughout each floor of the building to help create community

#### **Step 1**

##### **Building Switch Lottery Application Open March 3-23, 2020**

- Hold a social during the last week of February for potential upper level residents to meet each other and learn more about the residence hall.
- Switch Lottery Application opens allowing for roommate requests
  - Students will:
    - Form groups of up to 4 students (up to 8 in the case of Burton Conner residents)
    - Rank their top 4 buildings
    - Option to elect gender inclusive housing
  - Roommate requests with building preferences that do not match will be dissolved

**April 6, 2020:** HRS will send building results to students

#### **Step 2**

##### **Students who are assigned to New Vassar from switch lottery will be asked to verify roommate pairing.**

- New Vassar residents go to MyHousing to confirm roommate groups before self-selection starts (Roommate groups will be dissolved if building preferences do not match. HRS will verify these requests and/or allow students to update, if needed)
- Students can form all gender roommate pairs. They will be able to select a double in the self-selection.
- Housing Accommodations Undergraduate Housing
  - In order to keep student needs confidential, housing accommodations will be handled by the HRS staff only. Please see below.
- Hold a second social for upper level students who are assigned to New Vassar and want to meet potential roommates.

### Step 3

#### **“In-House” rooming process for students who elected to move into NVSR Open April 13-16, 2020**

- Students will be randomized within their class year.
  - Selection dates and times will be assigned based on the class year randomization seniors will pick first based on the randomized number.
    - Students will have access when their pick time begins and will continue to have access until they make their selection up until the time the application closes.
  - **Single Rooms:** Students selecting a single will select for themselves at their pick time or prior to the application closing.
  - **Double Rooms:** Students selecting a double will select for themselves along with another student who selected to live in New Vassar to fill the space.
    - If only doubles remain, the first person who selects the room will determine the gender of the space unless students form an all gender roommate pair in step 2.
    - Student still selecting when only doubles remain will be able to see who has selected one of the beds in the double.
- Final assignments are verified by HRS and results are shared with students. Rosters will be provided to the Heads of House and Area Director.

#### [Housing accommodations—undergraduate housing](#)

In order to keep student needs confidential, housing accommodations will be handled by the Housing & Residential Services staff only. Room Assignment chairs will not play a role in the assignment of these students. The process should be as follows:

1. HRS staff work directly with Heads of House and Area Director on the room placements for any student needing a housing accommodation. As a group it would be decided where the best placements for the students will be in the building and then that information would be communicated directly to the room assignment chairs.
2. HRS will suggest spaces that should be used during the academic year, if the placement is happening outside of a normal housing process.
3. During the normal housing processes, HRS staff will meet with the HHs and AD to identify the rooms that would be needed for both upper-level and first year assignments. During these meetings (fall and spring) the upper-level students can be housed. Once the first year lottery is complete, HRS will meet again with the HHs and AD to place those students
4. Once all placements are complete, the RACs will receive this information and know they cannot move those students.
5. The house operations manager will be informed of any student who will need evacuation assistance or modifications to their room based on their needs.

## Appendix C: Founders' Group Meeting Plan and Timeline

| Meeting Date  | Topic  | Notes  |
|---|--|--|
| October 24<br><i>Guests: Dennis Collins, Diane Myers, Sonia Richards, TJ Manning, Steven Newman</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review FG charge and deliverables</li> <li>Presentation and overview of building design</li> <li>Design decision: Fabrics for second floor common space</li> <li>Scheduling a site tour</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Site tour date/time to be confirmed.</li> </ul>   |
| November 7  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NV guiding principles that will inform future decisions related to policies and practices</li> <li>House government and constitution</li> <li>Assistant Director/Area Director selection process</li> </ul>   |  |
| November 19 @ 3pm   | Site tour  |  |
| November 21<br><i>Guests: Peter Cummings, Mark Hayes</i>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dining at New Vassar</li> <li>Dining plan to date</li> <li>House and meal plan format</li> <li>Marketplace usage</li> <li>Country kitchen and pods usage</li> <li>House gov't reports outs</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Naomi will start with an ice breaker.</li> <li>Steve and Naomi will update group on AD position.</li> <li>AGENDA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Dining at New Vassar and dining plan updates</li> <li>-House government information summaries (send completed forms to Don by 11/19).</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| December 5  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House gov't report outs</li> <li>Summary of house government reports (Don)</li> <li>Discussion of NV house government structure</li> <li>Room assignments process-upper level students</li> <li>First-year student room assignment process</li> </ul> | <p>Deadline for upper level process: February 1.</p> <p>Prep meeting on 11/19.</p> <p>Discuss with FG:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guided tours and other strategies to promote NV</li> <li>Percent of beds held for first-year students</li> <li>Develop a FAQ for FG members about NV</li> <li>CPW/REX</li> <li>I3 videos</li> </ul>        |
| January 16  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Upper level room assignment process (Rich)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce Emily Larson via email.</li> </ul>  |

|                              |   |  |
|------------------------------|---|--|
|                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GRA Selection process and timeline (Don)</li> <li>• Subcommittees (John Ross/Judy)—leads, charges, involving non FG members as needed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Wellbeing efforts (Naomi/Kate)</li> <li>-Promoting NV to upper level students (Rich/John Ross)</li> <li>-Welcoming first-years (CPW, REX, etc.) (Steve/Don)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Meeting schedule-spring semester (Jen)</li> <li>• Logo—student volunteers to capture core values</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite FG members to arrive 20 min early to have lunch.</li> <li>• Include charge for each subcommittee in meeting announcement.</li> </ul> |
| January 23                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subcommittee meeting time</li> </ul>   |  |
| January 30                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subcommittee reports and recommendations</li> </ul>  |  |
| Spring semester meetings TBD |   |  |

### **Other topics—tentative timeline**

#### ***February***

Subcommittee follow up (ongoing)

Dining and dining demos

Resident Peer Mentor program and selection

House government – review structure, determine how reps will be selected

House taxes

First-year room assignment process review and confirm, discuss placement

#### ***March***

Maker space tour

Visiting Scholar Program

Art work allocation

#### ***April***

Maker space proposal