

MIT's Relationship With Epsilon Theta

Epsilon Theta Corporation, Inc.

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1 Introduction

Epsilon Theta is a coeducational MIT fraternity located in Brookline. The house first formed in 1922; in 1974, it separated from its national over the issue of allowing women to live in the house, and rechartered as Epsilon Theta in 1976. Between 20 and 30 men and women live in the house, and all members share equally in house duties including waiting at meals, driving to and from campus, and answering the telephone.

Although E Θ is a fraternity in name, it shares several characteristics of independent living groups (ILGs), and is a member of MIT's Living Group Council (LGC). In addition to accepting women as members, E Θ prohibits alcohol consumption in the house during social events. House parties tend more towards being small and laid-back. "Not coffee" — typically chai and hot chocolate — is served on Thursday nights, and the social event requiring the most dress-up is the annual Halloween party.

This document will explore several aspects of E Θ 's recent experience with MIT. The house's location in Brookline causes our relationship with the town to be different from houses in Cambridge or Brookline, and the distance from the MIT campus gives E Θ a unique challenge with transportation. Over the past several years, MIT has also changed several of its policies with respect to fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups (FSILGs); this document will examine changes in MIT's meal plan policy, its alcohol policy, the mandatory Residential Advisor (RA) program for FSILGs, recent changes to freshman housing and FSILG recruitment, and MIT's view of the residence system as a whole. E Θ has also recently completed a \$700,000 renovation project, and MIT has been involved in various ways with both fundraising and the execution of the project itself.

2 Brookline

2.1 Brookline

Currently Brookline only has two FSILGs, both of them affiliated with MIT. Because this number is so small compared to Boston or Cambridge, E Θ 's relationship with Brookline is much different than it would be with Boston or Cambridge.

In general, E Θ 's relationship with Brookline has remained positive because E Θ keeps a relatively low profile. The house consciously seeks to cooperate with its neighbors, comply with Brookline regulations, and present itself to Brookline as a small unique community rather than as part of a multi-town institution. This approach has largely been effective: thus far Brookline has been very reasonable about inspections and other procedural issues, and incidents occurring in Boston and Cambridge have not "rubbed off" on the house's reputation.

Recently, there have been some dangers to EΘ's relationship with Brookline. The delays in construction and legal issues surrounding the recent renovation project did come to the attention of various Brookline officials. However, they seem to believe that the house has been acting in good faith to resolve those issues.

Because EΘ's good relationship with Brookline is based on maintaining a low profile, we prefer to continue dealing with Brookline directly and to keep MIT uninvolved in the process. While having a staff member at MIT to help manage the inspection process is probably very helpful for Cambridge and Boston houses, such a hands-on approach from MIT would only make EΘ's relationship with Brookline more difficult.

2.2 Transportation

EΘ's location in Brookline makes transportation to the MIT campus a key concern. The walk to campus takes about 35 minutes; public transit is an option, but in the best case this only reduces the trip to about half an hour. The house maintains a van, which makes between four and six scheduled trips to campus daily. At other times, house residents are heavily dependent upon MIT's transportation system to get between home and classes.

The house's van is a 15-passenger van. On weekdays there are morning runs to campus arriving at 8:55 and 9:55, and afternoon runs after classes leaving MIT at 4:15 and 5:15. The van is entirely funded by the house, including fuel, maintenance, insurance, and depreciation. EΘ members drive the van as a house duty. The van reduces the trip to campus to about 10 minutes each way, and provides protection from the elements in the winter. The house also uses the van for tasks such as shopping and house retreats, and the van is available for members to use for personal trips for the cost of mileage.

When the van is not running, house residents take advantage of the transportation options MIT offers. The Safe Ride program is essential to members returning home to sleep after spending an evening on campus, and also is the primary way house residents get to campus for activities such as student activity meetings and academic work with other students who live on campus. Since EΘ is the last stop on the Boston West Safe Ride route, though, our transportation can be disrupted by events earlier on the route. Frequently the Safe Ride van is packed well beyond its safe capacity with passengers headed for destinations just on the other side of the Harvard Bridge in Boston. If the route is busy, Safe Ride drivers also have bypassed EΘ in an attempt to return to campus sooner. These disruptions can keep people living at EΘ from getting home, however, and when the van skips the EΘ stop there is no indication that residents might need to find another way to get to their evening lab work.

Inconsistencies in Safe Ride service have also adversely affected the house's recruitment program. EΘ goes through moderate effort to assure prospective members of the house that the distance from campus is not a problem, and that between the house van and Safe Ride it is generally straightforward to get to and from MIT. However, there have been multiple incidents in the past year when Safe Ride vans have driven by EΘ without stopping, in spite of guests to the house waiting on the front porch. A lack of commitment on MIT's part to making the Safe Ride service for houses further from campus makes EΘ less attractive to people who would consider living there.

This year, MIT also announced a "Boston Winter Shuttle" program, offering service similar to Safe Ride during the day. For EΘ residents, though, the program was sorely lacking. The route, which ran every 30 minutes, largely duplicated the MBTA #1 bus route, which runs every 8 minutes on weekdays. In addition two stops on Massachusetts Ave., there was a stop near Kenmore Square and one further east. While houses nearer campus, which already have near-

direct bus service, got an additional shuttle, the nearest stop to EΘ still involved a 20-minute walk to get home. The shuttle also didn't run during January, when many students are involved in on-campus IAP activities. EΘ participated in a petition through the Undergraduate Association to add an on-request stop further west along Commonwealth Ave. to serve itself and Zeta Beta Tau, also located in Brookline, but this was not implemented for the 2003-04 academic year.

MIT has given the house some support in its van operations. Most significantly, the van has a dedicated spot in the Stata Center garage. This enables student drivers to leave the van on campus between the morning and afternoon runs while they go to classes. MIT has also supported the house when the van has been out of service for extended periods of time for repairs by providing a Safe Ride van to substitute for normal daytime van runs.

3 MIT Policies

3.1 Alcohol

While Epsilon Theta does not outright ban alcohol, the house's social culture tends to be against recreational drinking. By internal policy, alcohol consumption is not allowed in the house during official social activities. At other times, drinking is permitted, but infrequent.

MIT does not enforce its alcohol policy for FSILGs evenly. Although a handful of houses have had numerous alcohol violations in the past several years, they did not receive sanctions commensurate with the severity of the violations. For example, the Cambridge License Commission recently suspended the housing licenses of two fraternities for the duration of rush because of their violations, yet MIT allowed them to hold rush. Consequently, an expectation was created that sanctions would be relatively light. Therefore, when the Interfraternity Council suspended another house for a full year on lesser charges, the decision was met with much outcry.

The sanctions MIT could levy are also diminishing in their power. Before President Vest's decision to house all freshmen on campus was implemented, the Institute had the option of barring houses that did not follow the alcohol policy from housing freshmen. That threat is no longer effective, as FSILGs no longer house freshmen. However, the Institute could deny houses funds from the Financial Transition Plan, designed to help FSILGs cope with their reduced income. That too is disappearing with the expiration of the Plan this upcoming year.

In addition, the current policy does not provide houses with an incentive to be more responsible with alcohol. Indeed, for houses that already hold only dry parties, such as EΘ, there is no incentive from MIT to continue its present behavior. What is missing from MIT's approach to its alcohol policy is recognition for compliant houses. For example, allowing responsible houses to host more prospective students (prefrosh) would encourage FSILGs to follow the alcohol policy more closely, since it also allows them more publicity. The Institute could even permit freshmen to reside in certain houses that meet specific criteria for adherence to the alcohol policy.

3.2 Resident Advisor Program

The Resident Advisor (RA) Program was instituted by MIT in the summer of 1998. Because of the rush to build a program in under two months, many of the responsibilities of RAs were left poorly defined. It is only now, with the formation of an RA Committee by Kaya Gerberich, that the program is receiving the review it has so desperately needed. We hope this process will culminate in a clear definition of the RA's duties, and in a commitment by MIT to fully fund participation in the program.

Epsilon Theta's Resident Advisor is in many ways an ordinary member of the house. Like every other member, she sleeps in a communal room on the third floor of the house, and is assigned study space on one of the lower floors (often rooming with as many as three other members). The RA is expected to perform the same house duties as any other active member, including meal cleanup once a week and house chores every few weeks.

At EΘ, the RA serves primarily as a mentor and peer to the undergraduates at the house. The RA is the only resident who receives in-depth training on resources provided by MIT, such as counseling services and the dean on call. As such, she serves as a valuable conduit for the information, and a principal resource for students with troubles. In this respect, MIT could do a more effective job integrating RAs into its own processes — for example, by recommending that a student in trouble bring their RA into the loop. In general, the MIT community seems to be unaware of RAs' availability as a student resource.

Truly independent living requires students to take responsibility for the tasks which need to be done in their house. As a result, the RA is separate from the governance of the house. She is welcome to attend (and speak at) house meetings, but does not vote, and does not help select new members. It is important that the RA not become a surrogate for the various house officers. It is simply not possible to expect the RA to fulfill her duties while simultaneously acting as a house manager, risk manager, or fire and safety officer. It is simpler, and better for the house as a whole, for the RA to work in concert with the officers of the house when trouble arises. MIT undermines this effort when it expects the RA to take responsibility for an officer's duties, for example by running fire drills or preparing for inspections.

Since 1998, EΘ has had three resident advisors, two of them house alumni, one a Berkeley graduate, all of them graduate students at MIT. In all cases, the approach of thesis crunch period has forced the RA to leave the house. MIT does not allow alumni of a house to serve as RA while students they lived with as undergraduates remain in the house. This means that there has been a comparatively narrow period during which the two alumni have been able to serve as RA — at least 3 years into graduate school, but at least 1 year away from finishing. While a certain detachment is desirable in an RA, this 3-year period should be shortened or even eliminated. This is particularly true because turnover can be problematic. Experience has shown that RA candidates referred by MIT are often a poor match for the house, and an independent search is required. MIT must provide better support for the search process, by assisting students in screening candidates for the process, and by advertising to attract a larger candidate pool.

Finally, MIT must provide funding for the full house bill of every RA at MIT. This year MIT cut RA funding to cover only room and board based upon numbers provided for transition funding reimbursement. The decision to cut funding was a serious misappropriation of the information provided for transition funding. Worse, it turns the RA into a second-class citizen. Should the RA be permitted to ride to and from campus in EΘ's van? Attend house retreats? Social events? Rush events? There must not be the slightest doubt in anyone's mind that the RA has the right to participate fully in the life of the house. In order to guarantee this, MIT must fully fund the program.

3.3 Dining

In the Spring of 2002 Epsilon Theta decided to implement a meal plan program so that people not living in the house could pay a fee and eat dinners with us. This decision was made in order to ameliorate any isolation between our freshmen and the house caused by the freshmen on campus decision. The meal plan also allows EΘ to build community with friends who live on campus that the house is not actively recruiting. We automatically offer a space on our meal plan to anyone we

give a bid to (a formal invitation to join the house). We have found our meal plan to be invaluable in fostering interaction and friendships between house residents, our new members, and friends of the house who could become new members in the future. Our meal plan has become a valuable recruitment tool under the new Rush system, since it keeps our new members coming by the house on a regular basis. This increases the likelihood of them moving in when they are able to do so. It also keeps students we are interested in rushing coming by the house, which is valuable in keeping in contact with them after the formal recruitment period is over.

Since we have our own meal plan, the mandatory meal plans for freshmen living in Baker, Simmons, Next and (next year) McCormick are worrisome, since they reduce the effectiveness of offering our meal-plan to residents of those dorm. People are understandably unwilling to pay twice for food, once with the \$200 fee to MIT Dining in exchange for half-off prices for food purchased in the dining hall, and again for dinner at EΘ. This decreases our ability to use our meal plan as a recruitment tool by decreasing the number of people likely to join our meal plan. Having people on our meal plan helps build a stronger sense of community both within the house and with the people coming over for dinner. While parties are fun social activities, dinners are naturally smaller and more intimate, and invite friendship between people sitting at the dinner table in an informal setting. Someone living in Simmons, Baker, or Next House who isn't on our meal plan is significantly more difficult to attract over to the house on a regular basis, and thus doesn't form the strong bonds with the house that are invaluable in ensuring retention. People who don't regularly eat dinner with the house are less likely to pledge if they have not joined, and are less likely to move in if they have pledged.

During this transitional time period, when we are already dealing with smaller house sizes as a result of freshmen living on campus and a changeover to stressful term-time recruitment periods, anything that weakens the effectiveness of our recruitment strategy must be seen as a serious threat. MIT has indicated a commitment to promoting the sustainability of independent living groups. We understand and acknowledge the importance of MIT Dining's profit issue, but hope and expect that MIT will be able to make a compromise that does not harm either of our two groups.

3.4 Rush

MIT has made many changes to the residence system, including changes to rush, in the last few years. Freshmen must live on campus their first year, choosing their residence over the summer based on MIT literature and experiences from Campus Preview Weekend. Rush is no longer a necessary part of Orientation.

As MIT has made its recent changes to the residence system, it has consistently failed to predict the effects of these changes, to review the changes and to use input from FSILGs about the changes and their effects. While this can be attributed in part to the short institutional memory of the offices making these changes, it shows that MIT is not consistently reviewing and modifying its policies in the residence system. For example:

- **Summer Contact.** During the summer, freshmen are able to give their contact information to MIT, requesting that FSILGs contact them. In the past, Epsilon Theta wrote individual, handwritten letters to each freshman who expressed interest in FSILGs. However, in recent years this information has not been released to FSILGs in such a way that would make contacting interested freshmen over the summer feasible. Last year interested freshmen could only be contacted once by the IFC, LGC, and Panhel combined. However, these organizations were only informed that their communications would have to be combined on receiving the con-

tact information. Further, these organizations were expecting the contact information to be released in the beginning of July, but in early July were informed that they would not be allowed to have the contact information until August 1st. The LGC, which has both male and female members, could potentially have 1000 freshmen to contact within the 2 weeks before pre-orientation programs begin and could have to coordinate to contact them with the IFC and Panhel. On request, the LGC also got permission to send mail to the freshmen who expressed interest, but only a single handwritten letter from the LGC as a whole, still preventing EΘ from writing letters to the freshmen. Even if EΘ had gotten permission to write the letters, since the contact information was only released August 1st, it would not be feasible for the 20 members to write the quantity of letters and send them to the freshmen before the freshmen would leave for pre-orientation programs.

- **Interactive Introduction to the Institute (I3).** MIT has recently started funding I3 CDs, which contain videos made by each living group, and sending the CDs to freshmen early in the summer. The first I3 CDs contained FSILGs and dormitories together, but for the last two years the dorm information was on a CD sent earlier in the summer and the FSILGs were on a separate CD sent later in the summer. While significant time, energy, and funds go to making the I3 CDs, EΘ has never heard of anyone we rushed actually viewing the material on the CDs and has seen no evidence that freshmen actually look at the CD that contains FSILG material.
- **Parent Guides.** In 2002, the LGC made a guide to the LGC houses aimed at parents. Although the LGC found these guides useful, it was unable to find funding for the next year.

There are some instances when MIT, while not strongly considering the effects of policy changes, has used input from FSILGS to modify the policies. For example:

- **Schedule of rush.** When MIT implemented its all freshmen on campus policy, MIT also required that FSILGs not start rushing until the 3rd Friday of term. However, MIT did not realize that students would receive their first tests and essays in the next week. Fortunately, MIT accepted that this time was too late for an effective rush and allowed FSILGs to rush earlier in term.

While predicting the results of policy changes can be difficult, many of these issues could be improved for future years if actions and policies were reviewed after they were implemented. We suggest that MIT form a Residence Policy Review Board that would need to review policy changes after they are implemented in order for them to remain as policy in following years. This board would include a member from each of the IFC, Panhel, and the LGC selected by the organizations and would gather input from members of these organizations to use in reviewing the policies.

3.5 Undergraduate Time Commitment

In evaluating how FSILG-wide changes were affecting EΘ, one of the things we noticed was that the members of the house felt that they had less time during the semester. We estimate that each member of EΘ can commit about six hours a week during the semester to the many tasks necessary to keep EΘ running. In a house with 20 members, this means that the house has a pool of 1680 readily available man-hours. (This assumes a 14-week semester.)

Basic house duties such as meal cleanup, van runs, and house chores have required about the same amount of time before and after the recent changes. In particular, we estimate that basic

Van runs	35 per week	×	0.5 hours	×	14 weeks	=	245 hours
Waits	7 per week	×	2.0 hours	×	14 weeks	=	196 hours
Potwashes	7 per week	×	1.0 hour	×	14 weeks	=	98 hours
Worksessions	6 per week	×	3.0 hours	×	14 weeks	=	252 hours
House meetings	4 per term	×	3.0 hours	×	20 people	=	240 hours
Total							1031 hours

Table 1: Time requirements for basic house duties

Treasurer			10 hours per week	×	14 weeks	=	140 hours
Commander			5 hours per week	×	14 weeks	=	70 hours
New Member Education	2 people	×	3 hours per week	×	14 weeks	=	84 hours
Steward			4 hours per week	×	14 weeks	=	56 hours
House Manager			3 hours per week	×	14 weeks	=	42 hours
Total							392 hours

Table 2: Time requirements for house officers

house chores require 1031 man-hours per semester (Table 1) and that the individuals holding the house offices most essential to the functioning of the house must spend about 392 hours per semester to get their jobs done (Table 2).

Before the recent changes to the FSILG system, this left a pool of 257 hours available to the house as a buffer against the other tasks, both planned and unplanned, which need to happen every semester. This amount of time generally left enough time for the members of the house to use some of their “house time” for such activities as clean up for inspections, organize house social events, deal with the occasional plumbing emergency, etc.

However, with the recent changes, this buffer is no longer available to the house. We believe that there are several changes that are draining away this extra time.

- First and foremost among them is rushing during the semester. At a minimum, to run an effective rush which lasts for two weekends and one week, the house needs to be able to entertain guests during the weekends. This requires that at least 5 house members be available to meet and get to know the rushees during about a 12 hour period on each weekend day. This requires about 240 total hours. Although many of the consultants provided by MIT have suggested that “recruitment” is more effective than holding a “rush”, we have found that trying to spread recruitment out over more time actually requires more time per pledge than holding one larger-scale rush.
- The second major factor is the changing of many other rush-related deadlines. For example, before about 1998, EΘ’s rush book was typically assembled during the summer, requiring about 40 man-hours. In 1999-2000, the FSILG office required that the rushbook be finished in early May. This meant that those 40 hours came directly out of the buffer time that the house had available to it.

In 2001, the Institute started the I3 video program. While we applaud the Institute’s efforts to find new ways for freshmen to be exposed to FSILGs, we also estimate that assembling the I3 video takes about 30 hours per year (with some footage reused from year to year). However, we have not been able to see any MIT-wide data that suggests that the incoming

freshmen actually look at the I3 CD, much less become interested in FSILGs or in specific houses by watching it. In fact, a quick poll of all of the people who received the I3 CD and joined EΘ suggests that not a single one of them had looked at the CD, much less seen EΘ's video. Despite this, the house continues to participate in I3. This is partially because there is a sense that if the house has not gotten enough new members, it reflects poorly on the house to have not taken every opportunity to advertise and partly because it has occasionally been implied that participation is important for receiving financial transition money.

Similarly, the house used to be able to write personal letters to each and every incoming freshman over the summer. New policies in 2003 about access to the names and addresses left the house unable to continue the program. Before, the house was able to receive about 60 responses over the summer from potentially interested freshmen without consuming any of the limited pool of hours available during the semester. Since then we haven't even been able to achieve anywhere near that number of rush contacts simply because we can't start meeting them until later in orientation and by then the amount of time house members can devote to the task is already limited.

- Since 1998, the house has had to find an RA three times (and is beginning the process again for fall 2004). This process requires about 50 total hours of work, and usually must be done during the semester so that potential RAs can meet the people that they would be living with.

It should be clear that the time that is required to keep the house going currently exceeds the amount of time which is usually available to it. We have observed that this has reduced the quality of life at the house in several ways. First, many members of the house no longer feel that they have time for house events which are fun but not expected of all members, such as the house retreat. However, these fun events help keep the house together as a group of friends and as a fraternity. Second, the fact that members seem to be generally less willing to run for house offices than members were four years ago is probably at least partly due to the fact that they are already devoting more time to things like rush. This detracts from EΘ's role in helping members learn leadership skills.

We do not mean to imply that new programs themselves are necessarily bad — in fact EΘ does generally support the RA program. However, we do feel that MIT could help to manage these problems in several ways.

First, MIT should be evaluating the effectiveness of all of its experimental programs, rather than just continuing them year after year. The I3 CD is a good example of this: if it is not an effective means of advertising, then the house would be much better off for being able to reclaim the time devoted to it. When evaluating the programs, MIT should also be aware of the impact the extra time has on the quality of life of FSILG members.

Second, MIT could help EΘ evaluate how effective the house's participation in various programs has been. For example, if many houses have gotten good results by participating in the I3 CD, MIT could help EΘ evaluate whether the problem is simply that EΘ's particular videos are not interesting enough or have some other problem.

Finally, in making policies, MIT should consider what a limited resource time is for students and for FSILGs. This might have helped MIT understand what a huge impact a seemingly small change (such as the change in summer contact policies) has had on the house.

What MIT has been doing to try to help is to try to cover some administrative tasks itself. For example, MIT now tries to maintain information about what we need to do for inspections, handle some of the bills that the treasurer would normally pay, etc. However, we have found that this

generally does not reduce the amount of time the house needs to devote to these tasks because it often seems to add another layer of bureaucracy to work through.

Another way MIT could help with the current time crunch is by supporting programs which help shift the burden into the summer and as early as possible into the school year. The fact that rush was several weeks earlier in 2003 than in 2002 definitely reduced the amount of time during the semester that the students spent on it. Moving it earlier in the semester or to before the semester would be even more helpful. (Although it might seem logical that a rush during IAP would be even less stressful, that is not the case because the preparation and advertising would be pushed to December and November, which are some of the worst months for students).

Ideally, the problem could also be solved by increasing the amount of time available to the house. There are two ways to potentially do this — having more members or having each member devote more time to the house. However, increasing the total number of members seems unlikely unless the house can devote substantially more time to recruitment. Increasing the number of hours that individual members are expected to commit is unrealistic for MIT students, and would likely not be effective for recruitment - engaging new members in life at the house becomes harder and harder as the existing house members become more stressed.

3.6 The Residence System

MIT should consider the residence system as an integrated whole, rather than thinking of FSILGs as being separate from the greater community. While MIT may claim that it already does so, it regularly makes changes without apparent consideration of the effects on the FSILGs. The dining issues described previously in this document provide an example of such a change.

MIT's portrayal of the FSILG system to the outside world also slights off-campus housing. In announcing the freshmen-on-campus decision, for example, MIT claimed the shift would enhance "campus-wide community." If living in a dorm — even a dorm a freshman chooses — is a necessary component of an introduction to the MIT community, then it's easy to conclude that FSILGs are no longer considered part of that community.

MIT has done a poor job of communicating the requirements for being considered a full and worthy part of the MIT community to the FSILG system and to individual houses. EΘ participates in extracurricular activities (albeit less than in the past, due to the time constraints of the extended recruitment period). Members have friends in other living groups; sometimes we visit them, and sometimes they visit us. the house offers a non-residential meal plan, holds weekly "not-coffee" nights, and throws occasional parties. EΘ is certainly not isolating itself from the rest of the Institute, although its Brookline location does at times provide a relaxing change of pace.

On the one hand, MIT considers us not to be part of the larger residence system. On the other hand, MIT handles some parts of our operations with no apparent benefit for us or for MIT.

One example is the billing for American Alarm. It appears that MIT now handles all of the billing for FSILG fire safety services. During our recent renovation project, EΘ received a bill that it handed to its contractors, but they had to process the bill through MIT rather than dealing with American Alarm directly. However, something went wrong and the amount was not credited to our account. In another incident, EΘ did not receive an American Alarm bill from MIT until after the bill's due date. EΘ and other FSILGs rely on American Alarm for very important safety functions. In addition, houses must contact them directly when we have false alarms. FSILGs need quick access to them at those times, and it could be potentially disastrous if a house called and was denied service because it hadn't paid a bill it had never seen.

Billing for sprinkler inspections has also been problematic. In Spring 2003, EΘ had its sprinkler system inspected, as did the rest of the FSILG houses. In September 2003, EΘ asked MIT for proof

of our sprinkler inspection, which we needed for a Brookline inspection scheduled for October. Week after week, the house was told that MIT was contacting the inspection company and would surely have the paperwork soon, but it did not appear. Eventually MIT provided the contact info for the inspection company, and the house's alumni corporation applied a particularly tenacious alum to the problem. We received a fax of the paperwork shortly thereafter. Unfortunately, by this time our inspection had occurred; fortunately, Brookline allowed us to give them the paperwork at that time, rather than requiring a whole new inspection.

We see several problems with this scenario:

- There was extra work for MIT: dealing with the sprinkler company, and dealing with an FSILG that wanted its paperwork in a timely fashion.
- EΘ did at least as much work with MIT involved as it would have done without it. Without MIT, the house might have had to spend more time pestering the inspection company — but with MIT, it did not save that time, because it spent it pestering MIT instead.
- The house tries to maintain a good relationship with Brookline inspectors. It is reasonable for them to expect proof of sprinkler inspection, and it should have been able to produce it for them in a timely fashion without unreasonable delays added by MIT.
- At one point EΘ got the impression that the inspection company was withholding the paperwork because it had not received payment for all the MIT houses. If this is true, it is unfortunate that health and safety inspections can be held up for an individual house because of MIT's bureaucracy.

It is possible that this system works for houses on the Cambridge and Boston inspection cycles: presumably MIT wrangled the paperwork out of the inspection company in time for Cambridge and Boston inspections. But it seems as though EΘ's presence in this system causes additional hassle both for the house (stuck without our paperwork) and for MIT (having to get the paperwork early because of just one or two houses).

We understand that some houses have, in recent years, failed to handle basic safety and government-relations issues for themselves; we understand that MIT must intervene in such situations. Indeed, for perpetual offenders, MIT might consider letting the licensing boards shut them down for non-compliance — if a house is not functioning after repeated help, something is probably wrong.

Perhaps the FSILG Cooperative could handle some of these functions. This approach would allow MIT to focus on programmatic aspects of the FSILGs, would allow each house to have its own account with outside contractors, and would allow those contractors to be paid in a timely fashion (indeed, more quickly and reliably than even a functioning house and corporation, in many cases). We would suggest this approach as a compromise, except that we don't understand the forces that are causing MIT to be involved in these functions, and so it's hard for us to know what a compromise would entail.

We believe it is possible to be part of the MIT community while remaining independently owned and operated. Indeed, we hope for exactly that situation. But instead, what we see from MIT is a clear indication — intended or otherwise — that FSILGs are not part of the MIT community, combined with the addition of sometimes perplexing constraints on our day-to-day operations.

4 Renovations

4.1 Fundraising

As part of our renovations, Epsilon Theta undertook a \$300,000 alumni fundraising campaign in 2001 to offset the cost of the project. From information previously received from the Alumni Association, we expected that we would be able to receive quite a bit of assistance from them.

At the Alumni Leadership Conference in 1999, the FSILG coordinator in the Alumni Association office presented a very good workshop on alumni relations for FSILGs. As part of that meeting (as also separately at an AIFC meeting) a list was presented with all the services the Association could provide to FSILGs. Included in those services were

- Provide a mailing list of a house's alumni
- Provide the level of giving of a house's alumni
- Provide use of the Association's phones for fundraising purposes
- Ideas for fundraising materials/approaches
- Provide experience from assisting other houses

Our experience using the services of the Alumni Association for our fundraising campaign, however, were not what we were led to expect.

We used the Alumni Association's resources on two different occasions. First was getting alumni mailing information to update our database of alumni addresses. Epsilon Theta maintains its own on-line database of alumni and friends of the house. While it tends to lag MIT's database in addresses, it is much more complete with respect to membership and contains data beyond that which MIT maintains. The database was originally seeded with information from the Alumni Association provided for that purpose and augmented with our own information. For our fundraising campaign we wanted to synchronize our database with MIT's to make sure our addresses were current. What we found was that the process to get the addresses was more complicated and the addresses provided came with the stipulation that we could not use them for our own database.

The second occasion to use the Association's resources was to get information about our alumni's giving history. We first attempted to get this information in January 2000. The person we contacted was happy to help and after several phone calls, eventually provided us with the wrong data. Instead of providing information of the giving level of each alum, they provided aggregate data for each decade which was useless for our purposes. The alumni association repeatedly refused to provide more detailed information. Epsilon Theta alumni had to aggressively lobby for the information, including several visits in person, before they provided the information that we needed.

Because of these discouraging interactions with the alumni office, we did not approach MIT about any of the other fundraising services they might provide. Instead, we approached Phi Kappa Sigma, who had just completed a successful fundraising campaign for their renovations, for fundraising ideas. They graciously met with us to discuss their fundraising strategies and even provided us with copies of their fundraising materials. We based our highly-successful fundraising campaign on the information that we gained from $\Phi\kappa\Sigma$.

Finally, we note that in 2002, the alumni office claimed to offer similar services to those they offered in 1999, but we had trouble using. It would be great if these services are provided and easily

accessible to the FSILG system as they are very useful for establishing the fundraising structure necessary to upgrade the physical plant of the FSILGs. We look forward to the addition of Theta Chi alumnus Bob Ferrara as Director of FSILG Alumni Relations; having an active FSILG alumnus in a prominent position within the alumni office should help improve MIT's relationship with FSILGs.

4.2 The Renovation Project

The actual renovation project took place over the summer of 2002. Various stumbling blocks caused the project to be delayed into the fall academic term. We describe our experience here, and note both situations where MIT significantly assisted EΘ and situations where MIT could have done more. We believe that since all FSILG renovation efforts have a number of common issues, but that each individual FSILG undertakes significant renovations rarely, MIT has the opportunity to play a significant role in educating and supporting houses during the process.

- **General** Our strongest recommendation is that MIT match up each house which is undertaking major renovations with a staff person who can help that FSILG connect with appropriate MIT resources and advocate for the FSILG at various MIT offices if needed. As described below, we did not always realize at the time that MIT expertise could have been helpful. We believe that if we had been meeting once a month with someone from MIT who was knowledgeable about renovations, the entire process might have turned out better.
- **Architect selection** In identifying candidate architects, MIT assisted EΘ by helping us get in touch with other FSILGs who had recently done renovations, so we could ask them who they had used. Additionally, MIT's FSILG office had worked with a particular architect and general contractor to perform system-wide fire and safety upgrades within the last decade, so we also considered this firm. Architects who have experience working on FSILG-scale residences and satisfying both lodging house/institutional requirements and residential considerations are hard to find. Someone who concentrates primarily on private residences is inappropriate, but someone who concentrates mostly on larger, institutional buildings is also inappropriate. An additional service that MIT (possibly through the FSILG cooperative) might consider providing is to maintain a central list of architects who work in this genre.
- **Legal services** Over the course of the project, EΘ worked with a number of lawyers and other consultants. This was, and continues to be, extremely expensive. MIT's lawyers were not willing to meet with us or advise us on any issues. It seemed that MIT was primarily concerned about avoiding any perceived involvement or support of EΘ's case, refusing to provide even non-controversial factual information on MIT's housing policies.
- **Emergency housing** We needed about a month of housing for our undergraduate students at the start of the semester. For the first week, we housed students distributed among local alumni. MIT assisted by suggesting which FSILG's might have rental space, and we were able to rent some temporary housing from another FSILG for most of the students. MIT was also able to make several rooms available in a graduate dormitory, and also made available the option to put students into emergency undergraduate barracks housing. We would recommend that FSILG's and MIT agree on a contingency plan ahead of time for any major construction project. We commend MIT's efforts to help us house students on short notice.

5 Conclusion

Over the past several years, MIT has played a more prominent role in the affairs of Epsilon Theta and other MIT fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups. Some changes, such as the institution of the Resident Advisor program, have worked out well for E Θ ; others, such as changes in on-campus dining, have worked to the house's detriment. This document has reviewed special considerations due to E Θ 's location in Brookline, some MIT policies affecting the FSILG system, and MIT's involvement in E Θ 's recent renovation project.

We have a number of recommendations for MIT, on the basis of E Θ 's recent experiences:

- Avoid interfering in E Θ 's affairs with Brookline. Let the house manage its own inspections and neighbor affairs.
- Provide consistent Safe Ride service to Brookline, and provide special winter shuttle service to houses further from campus. Continue to support house van operations with on-campus parking and by providing replacement transportation if the van is unavailable.
- Make alcohol policy more consistent across houses. Provide rewards for houses that hold dry parties and otherwise provide a safe environment.
- Fully fund the Resident Advisor program, and make it possible for alumni RAs to remain in their position for longer.
- Support FSILG meal plans. Encourage undergraduates to visit FSILGs for meals by arranging for students to not pay for the same meal to both an FSILG and MIT Dining.
- Create a consistent means for FSILGs to contact incoming freshmen over the summer, with flexibility in the possible advertising. Provide funding and other support for an LGC parent guide. Review the "Interactive Introduction to the Institute" (I3) program and other programs instituted recently for effectiveness, creating a Residence Policy Review Board to accommodate this.
- Minimize term-time requirements on undergraduates for new member and RA recruitment, making more time available for academic and extracurricular pursuits.
- Treat FSILGs as first-class members of the residence system and the MIT community. Avoid acting as an intermediary between houses and service providers, either letting houses deal with vendors directly or handing off this role to the FSILG Cooperative.
- Have the Alumni Office provide more active support to houses, improving alumni contact and fundraising opportunities.
- Provide a staff contact person for houses performing renovation projects. Provide support to projects as needed, including legal support and emergency housing.

We feel the FSILG system is one of MIT's strongest assets. While houses, including Epsilon Theta, have faced a number of challenges from MIT over the past several years, improved support from MIT can help the system prosper.