

Student Life - FSILGs (Fraternities, Sororities & Independent Living Groups)



Peter Jaglom '05 & alumni parent, Drew Jaglom '74.

Fraternities and MIT: A Winning Combination

By Drew Jaglom '74, P '05

Thirty years ago this month, just after I graduated, The Tech, MIT's student newspaper, ran a column I co-authored on the benefits of fraternity living at MIT. Now, as the parent of an MIT senior, I've been asked to write a similar piece for this parents' newsletter. My son and I both joined the Delta Tau Delta fraternity at MIT, and we both found it played a huge part in our successful MIT careers. When I look back at my years at MIT, I remember my fraternity experiences even more than those in the classroom, in laboratories and on athletic fields.

A lot has changed in the last thirty years, but much is the same. MIT remains the nation's premier educational institution for science and technology. And fraternities, sororities and other independent living groups (FSILGs) remain an integral part of the MIT campus, with just under a third of all upperclass undergraduate students and nearly half of all upperclass men living in FSILGs. (While freshmen generally agree to join an FSILG soon after they arrive on campus, they initially live in an MIT dorm and may not move into the FSILG until their sophomore year.) Indeed, MIT has a higher proportion of its students in FSILGs than just about any other elite university. The groups are varied, with 27 fraternities (one is co-ed), five sororities, and five other independent living groups (four are co-ed).

The popularity of this system seems at odds with the stereotypes of MIT students and fraternities. These stereotypes also have changed little from thirty years ago, when I wrote "The MIT student is supposed to be a brilliant recluse, short and skinny, wearing thick glasses and carrying a slide rule." Well, the slide rule is gone, but the image of the nose-to-the-grindstone nerd remains, and is equally divorced from the reality of the well-rounded and well-adjusted students I meet as an alumnus interviewer. The image of the stereotypical fraternity - as an elitist, hard-partying Animal House where freshman are hazed and studying is impossible - is equally inaccurate, particularly at MIT, where the membership of the FSILGs reflects the students who make up the MIT community. They are smart, serious about academic success, but with many other interests in music, sports, politics and a myriad of other fields.

The FSILGs provide the perfect complement to the intensity of MIT. The academic challenges and pressures at MIT are unparalleled. The freshman year can be particularly stressful. The natural support group of a fraternity, sorority or other independent living group makes it much easier to deal with the academic rigor. Surrounded by upperclassmen who have been through the same classes and who care about their success, underclassmen in the FSILGs have an invaluable resource. All FSILGs also have a graduate student resident advisor who is available to help with advice on academics and life.

The FSILGs also provide a release from the stress and pressures of MIT through a close-knit group of friends, a social program, intramural athletic teams of every ability. The ability to decompress from the MIT grind periodically is essential, and the FSILGs make that easier to do, offering not just parties, but community service activities, group outings, intramural sports and, perhaps best of all, just the opportunity to hang out with good friends. In addition, only a small part of a college education comes in the classroom. Many of the most valuable lessons I learned came

from my fraternity. The FSILGs are independent organizations. Their members must govern it and make it run smoothly. Most own their own houses, generally through alumni "house corporations". The members must plan and carry out all maintenance, renovations, finances, meal service, social events and other aspects of running a living group. Most are assisted by active alumni groups, but every member must be prepared to be a contributing part of the larger group, and to help make it the kind of place they want to live.

Indeed, this aspect of fraternity life complements the education MIT offers. MIT excels at creating brilliant engineers, scientists and entrepreneurs, but some have suggested that MIT could do more to enhance teamwork, communication, and leadership skills. It is precisely these leadership and interpersonal skills that are honed by living in an FSILG.

As fraternity members, my son and I learned how to help run an organization, work as a team for the benefit of all, and to resolve differences with a diverse group of people with backgrounds quite different from our own. And we learned to give and receive the support of some forty close friends, all interested in each other's well-being. That is a recipe for forming lifelong friendships. Indeed, the vast majority of my friends from MIT are those from my fraternity.

Looking back on my years at MIT, I attribute both my success and my enjoyment of that time to my fraternity. As a parent, I have seen my son have the same experience. I am convinced that joining an FSILG both enhances the MIT experience, and helps ensure a college career that is both successful and fun. With 37 different FSILGs, with varied approaches and differing focuses, I believe there is a good fit for every interested student. As both an alumnus and a parent, I strongly encourage every incoming freshman to explore the FSILG options.

For more information on FSILGs at MIT go to: <http://web.mit.edu/slp/fsilgs/>