

Memorandum

TO: Cynthia Barnhart, Chancellor  
Ian Waitz, Vice Chancellor

CC: Suzy Nelson, VP and Dean for Student Life  
Judy Robinson, Senior Associate Dean for Residential Education  
David Friedrich, Senior Associate Dean for Housing and Residential Services  
Cecilia Stuopis, Medical Director

FROM: Heads of House:  
Julie and Neel Shah, Sidney Pacific  
John Fernandez and Malvina Lampietti, Baker House  
Alberto Rodriguez and Nuria Jane, Sidney Pacific  
Adam Berinsky and Deirdre Logan, Ashdown House  
Pablo Jarillo-Herrero and Empar Rollano-Hijarrubia, Next House  
David and Pamela Mindell, Edgerton House  
Dawn and Larry Anderson, Tang Hall  
Sandy Alexandre, East Campus  
Eden and Cristian Medina, East Campus  
Katharina Ribbeck, Eastgate  
Wesley L. Harris, New House  
David A. Singer, MacGregor House  
John and Ellen Essigmann, Simmons  
Steven R. Hall, Simmons / New Vassar  
Naomi Carton, Westgate  
Claudia and David Darmofal, Warehouse  
Kristen Selheim, 70 Amherst  
Suzanne Flynn and Jack Carroll, Maseeh Hall  
Katharine and Yuriy Roman, Ashdown House  
Terry and Larry Sass, MacGregor House  
Jared and Laurie Berezin, Random House

This memo is based on input provided by all 18 houses at MIT:  
Baker, MacGregor, McCormick, New House, Next House, Simmons, Eastgate,  
Edgerton, 70 Amherst, Sidney Pacific, Warehouse, Ashdown, Westgate, EastCampus, Random,  
Tang, Burton Conner, Maseeh

DATE: June 8, 2020

SUBJECT: Strongly Discourage Fall 100% Return Option

As faculty who live on campus in the undergraduate and graduate residences, we have a uniquely close view into both the academic and social circumstances of the MIT student body. We carry responsibility for helping them foster community, we act as stewards of the Institute's values, attend to both academic and personal needs in times of crisis, and in some cases help enforce Institute policies.

As such, this group brings an important perspective regarding the feasibility and desirability of the various Fall Return Options.

All Heads of House teams in 17 of the 18 dorms provided input on the options. We have summarized our collective input in a shared reflection on the 100% return to campus option. Before, we would like to note that:

- The Heads of House at Burton Conner did not sign the letter owing to the uncertainty surrounding the status of Burton Conner residents.
- The Heads of House at McCormick Hall did not sign the letter because some of the statements are in conflict with the conversations maintained in the McCormick Community.

## Results

**94%** of the Heads of House who expressed their opinion, representing 16 dorms, urge the senior leadership team to forgo further consideration of the 100% Return Option based on the following:

- 1) Core values: One of the core values of residential life at MIT is to create a safe environment. The risk and complexity associated with the plans to bring 100% of UG back to campus [e.g., using hotels or implementing a pod structure with strict requirements for physical distancing outside the pods] significantly compromises MIT's ability to create a safe environment for those that live and work in the dorms.
- 2) Failure modes of social distancing in dorms: It is not reasonable to expect full compliance with physical distancing rules.
  - a) Student self-regulation and compliance with social distancing rules will be compromised due to a high-stress environment. Based on input from students, and given what we know about human behavior and the mental health implications of complying with social distancing measures, we may see students start relaxing their standards of compliance. We expect it will be challenging to maintain full compliance with physical distancing and mask-wearing.
  - b) House teams will lack effective ways to enforce physical distancing in dormitory buildings with a structure and culture that is intentionally designed to promote interactions. Further, infrastructure of some of the residential buildings does not facilitate social distancing and safe living when operating at high density.

- c) Dorms cannot be physically isolated from the campus and surrounding community.
- 3) Inequities caused by the need to house a large number of UG off-campus:
- a) Creating a well-supported residential community takes time and resources. Creating several new communities in different hotels with support from existing House Teams is not a viable solution. House Teams must be co-located to adequately support and respond to community concerns. Existing Faculty House Teams are already coping with an untenably high workload and can not safely and effectively provide additional support to new communities distributed across Cambridge. Co-located staffing comparable to those in existing dorms would be necessary for each new site.
  - b) Hotel rooms and hotels in general, especially with restrictions, are not conceived for study (e.g. many rooms may not have a decent working desk, chair) or long-term living (e.g. many rooms may not allow any means of cooking), and will make it more difficult to enforce social distancing.
- 4) Lack of flexibility from straining the system: The strain from planning and running a residential system with 100% UG back while implementing physical distancing will leave no flexibility to respond to contingencies if there is an outbreak on campus.
- 5) False sense of security: Inviting all UG back to campus might create a false sense of security and a false sense of [back to] normalcy, thereby sending the wrong message and increasing the possibility for noncompliance. For those students that can safely live and study from home during the Fall semester, an incentive to do so (e.g., study grants, reduced tuition) would convey a more clear and accurate message.

**6%** of the Heads of House who expressed their opinion, representing 1 dorm, advocate for further consideration of the 100% return option and offer the following points for consideration:

- “I think it's feasible with proper technical and financial resources and the only one that fulfills our mission.”
- “Students will come back to Cambridge whether we house them or not, and it will make more sense to have them where we can exert some behavioral control (as in the dorms, with testing, mask use, hygiene protocols, etc.). Students should be presented with the very clear set of rules for the new community standards (including mandatory testing upon arrival and every-so-often), and the implications of not following them (involve legal, enforce discipline, etc.). If they agree, they can come back. MIT cannot guarantee 100% safety, and neither can any other space, institution, public venue, etc. during a pandemic.”
- “MIT will not be asking for anything more -or beyond- of what everyone is already doing at home: masks, hand-washing, and distancing except from those in the same household (in this case your floor-mates). It seems to me like we are not trusting this age group to behave like the adults they are.”