

May 10, 2013

Dear Chancellor Grimson and Dean Colombo:

We, student leaders from each of the eleven other undergraduate dormitories, are writing to express our concerns about the plan to house Bexley residents in other dormitories, as well as about the circumstances leading to the building's closure. We would like to offer our thoughts both on Bexley's current situation and on what should be considered for other dorms moving forward.

We sincerely appreciate that the Housing Strategy Group, the UA, and DormCon were able to come together on such short notice and devise a way to relocate Bexley students in blocks. We agree that this proposal is the best possible compromise if Bexley residents must move to other dormitories. Therefore, if this constraint remains after other options have been explored, we and our Rooming Assignment Chairs will continue to work with Residential Life to implement the blocking system. However, we want to make sure that decision-makers are fully aware of the extent to which it would disrupt Bexley as well as the other communities.

First, we are concerned about how and whether Bexley's culture will survive after integration into other dorms. Each dormitory's culture is highly unique and an integral part of its residents' lives: this is one of the most important components of the MIT undergraduate experience. As fellow MIT students, we feel that Bexley's culture needs to be preserved, but this is infeasible under the current plan because it does not let substantial groups of Bexley residents live together. Breaking Bexley up for three years will make it extremely difficult for them to retain any of their social structure, and will restrict their ability to recruit underclassmen to repopulate the dorm when they move back in.

Furthermore, a significant influx of already-established social groups from Bexley will undeniably have an effect on our own homes. Although we respect and value Bexley, we are concerned about trying to fold such a strong and well-defined culture into our existing dorm cultures, and about having to adapt to more changes in our communities once Bexley reopens. Both the addition and subtraction of residents will strain the infrastructure of our living communities.

Due to these concerns, we want to ensure that alternatives are fully explored. We understand that many residents of Bexley joined together to write a letter detailing specific alternatives, and we support them in their efforts to find a location to house 40-60 students together.

Looking beyond Bexley, we feel that this incident has exposed a significant issue that ought to be addressed. It is troubling that Bexley was determined to be an unsafe environment on such short notice. For the safety of all dorm residents, we need to re-evaluate how buildings are monitored so that this does not happen again to other dorms.

This incident also demonstrates the need for contingency plans in case other residential buildings need to close in the future. After we find a new home for the Bexley residents, we must turn our attention to the other dorms that have accumulated deferred maintenance issues. For each of these buildings, there needs to be a channel of

communication—such as a committee or working group—that connects residents with the involved staff, engineers, and faculty. In addition, to prevent this stress and confusion from recurring, we would like to generate concrete plans in writing now (for example, identifying swing spaces) that can be implemented on very short notice in the unlikely event that another dorm’s residents find themselves similarly displaced. By planning ahead, we can minimize the chance that renovations will have such a severely negative effect on dorm community and culture.

This year in particular, we have all been reminded time and time again of the important role of residential life in an MIT education. With each celebration we hold and each crisis we endure, we are reminded of the powerful and inspiring impact that our living communities have on our residents. Our community and our culture is what makes us strong, what inspires us to work together and grow together, and what distinguishes us from our peer institutions. For many of the residents in our communities, this sense of community is the primary reason students chose to enroll at MIT.

Thank you for your time and for your sensitivity to these important issues. We trust that you will take our concerns, as well as those of the Bexley residents, into consideration.

Sincerely,

Nathan Kipniss
Simmons House Committee Chair

Andrea Gutierrez Marty
Baker House President

Anna Ho
New House President

Akhil Raju
Burton Conner President

Linda Seymour
Next House President

Kelly Snyder
East Campus President

Rachel Keeler
Random Hall President

Leonid Grinberg
East Campus Vice President

Jacob Hurwitz
Random Hall Representative

Walter Menendez
MacGregor House President

Rachel Ellison
Senior House Representative

Clay Goggil
Maseeh Hall President

Dion Larson
Senior House Representative

Henna Jethani
McCormick Hall President

Alina Kononov
Senior House Representative

cc: President Reif and Executive Vice President Ruiz