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Want to join the newsletter team?

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The Official Newsletter of the Ashdown Community



Are you Cultured?

By: *Basky Muralidharan, Chair, Cultural Committee*

Ashdown House was established over 70 years ago as the first graduate residence on campus. From the beginning, Ashdown has fostered a tight-knit community, provided a wealth of activities for its residents, and has founded many traditions relating to social and cultural life. An important aspect of enriching the cultural life among our residents is the organization of several cultural events, mediated by the cultural committee. Greater Boston area is a great place to expand one's cultural horizons, with such a widespread international community. No matter what your socio-cultural background is, Boston has something for everyone.

The cultural committee at Ashdown strives in providing to our residents a cultural perspective of this city's mileu by organizing a variety of trips and events ranging from in-house events to outdoor trips. Our committee is very active in promoting such

events that promote such a cultural awareness. During such outings, I find that residents love interacting with each other, promoting joyous social and cultural exchange. As the chair of the committee, I am proud to present some of the work our committee has been up to during the past few months.

On the snowy Sunday, a small group of Ashdown residents ventured to the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) Boston, to get a flavor of "ghetto art". We saw an exhibit of Shepard Fairey's work, titled Supply & Demand. We had a guide that, in particular, attenuated the commercial aspects of Fairey's art. She also pointed out several places in Cambridge where we could see Fairey's work "in the wild.". After the visit of the exhibit, we all had lunch together and returned to Ashdown.

Around a month later we did a real fun trip to

"candle pin bowling". This is a special bowling style typical in the New England area. It differs very much from the traditional bowling, in terms of both the pins and the ball that is employed. This bowling alley near Davis square boasts of its 50s style décor and the fact that it is totally not-so-state-of-the-art. We thoroughly enjoyed keeping the score with pen and paper, while waiting for the mechanical return of our bowling pins.

During the summer time, we organized a couple of events spanning from an enjoyable Boston Ice-cream fest to a trip to the Science museum and IMAX show. Our summer activities ended with a memorable trip to the Blue man group show. The turnout for this trip was so overwhelming that we had the sign-up sheet filled in 15 minutes after the original call was sent.

Our fall activities have begun this September and

we started off with an introduction to Boston for both new/old timers with the famous duck-tours.



Although a typical New England summer storm makes the weather wet and cold, we still managed to get on the duck and started an unusually tour in the historical part of Boston. The driver was in a cool baseball custom and flied us through all the old buildings, parks, and stories. As

most of the group is new students of MIT, this is definitely a wonderful city orientation for their long life in Boston. The duck finally hit into the dark Charles River. Three people from the group were lucky enough to steer the duck in the river and got memorable pictures as the captain.

As a part of our committee, we strive to promote a strong cultural awareness of events around the Boston area. The Boston cultural-mileu is very vibrant and encompasses several aspects of both American and international culture. I consider it a great privilege living in a city like this, and I hope that patrons from Ashdown (especially with a cultural inclination) feel the same way about this amazing city. We really look forward to the events that are planned in the near future.

The GSC's Housing and Community Affairs (HCA) Committee: What has it done for you lately?

By: Wendy Lam

Every weekday morning, hundreds of graduate students hop onto the familiar white Northwest Daytime shuttle, taking many of them directly from their graduate residences to their labs or classes on campus. For the past few years, many of these students have come to rely on this shuttle as their main mode of transportation around the MIT campus. However, chances are that few of them realize how close they were to losing that shuttle service this year.

Many of the services, resources, and benefits that graduate students enjoy today are in fact the direct result of the efforts of several graduate student volunteers in the Graduate Student Council (GSC) at MIT. In particular, the Housing and Community Affairs (HCA) Committee, one of the thirteen standing committees in the

GSC, oversees all issues related to student and residential life, such as housing, stipends, transportation, health and dental insurance, safety and dining. The HCA committee is informally known as the main advocacy branch of the GSC, as the committee interacts regularly with MIT administrators to advocate on behalf of the entire graduate student body.

In light of the current economic crisis, the HCA Committee's overarching goal for this year is to ensure that students retain the same quality and number of services when financially possible. The Northwest shuttle is an example of a service that was in danger of being dropped due to Institute-wide budget cuts. However, using a data-driven approach, our committee successfully advocated for retaining the shuttle service, and has since been working with MIT

Parking and Transportation to expand transportation options in the Northwest community.

While the committee oversees many aspects of student life, its efforts are focused on two main issues this year: dental insurance and stipends. In 2007-08, the HCA committee successfully advocated for a dental insurance plan for graduate students, which was then implemented in the following year. Though mainly a preventative and diagnostic plan, it was the first time that MIT had provided such an option to its graduate students. This year, using a data-driven approach, our committee is working on advocating for a more comprehensive plan that offers coverage of restorative care.

Each year, the GSC makes a stipend recommendation to the MIT administration. Using survey data and annual government

inflation statistics, the HCA committee calculates the increase in the cost of living at MIT and presents that data to the Dean's Group each year. Last year, the committee calculated a 4.9% increase in the cost of living at MIT and made a stipend recommendation to match that figure. However, due to budget cuts, the administration approved a slightly lower increase at 3.4%. Our committee will continue this tradition of working with the administration to advocate for a stipend increase for graduate students, but will have to again face the challenge of dealing with a reduced budget.

Like all committees in the GSC, the HCA committee is open to all graduate students at MIT, especially those who are interested in becoming involved in the GSC's advocacy efforts. Whether you want more information on how to join our committee or you simply have a suggestion or a concern, you can reach the committee chairs at gsc-hca@mit.edu.

Wendy Lam is a PhD student in Biology and a resident of Ashdown House. She and Matthew Walker are the co-chairs of the HCA committee for the 2009-10 academic year.

Movies @ Ashdown

By: Meekyung Kim

As we are entering a season when the idea of cozying up with a movie sounds very attractive, I thought it'll be a good idea to go over the movies polices at Ashdown.

I am sure many of you had already checked out and watched the movies before, but just in case you are wondering "wait, we had movies here???" yes, and this is how you can watch them!

1. **Decide what you want to watch**

We have an ever-growing DVD collection (though the growth rate is rather slow..) You can check out the movie listing at the front desk, or online at <http://ashdown.mit.edu/frontdesk.php> Don't see the DVD you wanted to watch? Email ashdown-movie@mit.edu and make a suggestion!

2. Check out the movie Make sure you bring your ID with you to check out the movie (well, people *do* forget sometimes...) Check-out times are 8am to midnight: you cannot check out any

items past midnight, so plan ahead!

3. **Watch the movie**

DVD players can be found in the TV lounge, and also on kitchens on floors 2, 3, 4, 5 (look on the side of the TV)***IMPORTANT*** In the TV lounge, please **DO NOT** re-configure the cables in the rack. If you intend to connect your own multimedia device (laptops, karaoke machines, etc.), you may do so, but do not, under any circumstance, unplug anything that is already connected.

4. **Return the movie**

Movies can be checked out for a maximum of 48 hours at a time. If an item is overdue for more than 72 hours, fines may be incurred of \$1 per day up to the value of a replacement item.

Please report damaged DVDs to Front Desk when you check them in so we know to replace them. Items broken from normal wear-and-tear will not be fined if reported immediately.



5. **Repeat steps 1~4 as often as you wish ;-D**

All right – that's it! Pretty simple huh? We are currently purchasing new movies to add to the Ashdown collection, so please continue making suggestions and feel free to email any comments you have... happy movie-watching!

