



**Alumni Get-
Together is in
April! Check the
Ashdown website
in February for
updates!**

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Happy Holidays From Ashdown!

Hello Ashdown Alumni! We hope you are enjoying your holiday season, free from the end-of-semester worries that still plague current Ashdown-residents here at MIT. In this newsletter, we'll update you on what has been going on around Ashdown in the past year. We'll start by introducing you to our new Housemasters and members of the Ashdown House Executive Committee (AHEC). We'll continue by reviewing some events that occurred in Ashdown last year, including our 4th of July BBQ, orientation dance party and spring concert and dessert night. Be sure to stay tuned through the end because we are soliciting input from YOU on how to improve our annual spring alumni event.

We hope this update finds you well and look forward to seeing many of you at the alumni event in the spring. Happy holidays and best wishes for the new year!

Introducing the New Housemasters

This past summer, Ashdown welcomed new housemasters, Adam and Deirdre Berinsky and their two children, Benjamin and Lila. Adam has been a professor of Political Science at MIT since 2003; he studies public opinion and political behavior. Deirdre is a licensed clinical psychologist who works at Boston Children's Hospital. We recently caught up with Adam and Deirdre and wanted to share some of their thoughts on Ashdown and their new roles as Housemasters



Ashdown's New Housemasters

Question: As the new housemasters, what is the most surprising thing about Ashdown so far? How is living in Ashdown ?

Answer: It was definitely an adjustment for us when we first arrived toward the end of the summer - there was a lot for us to learn in a short time. We had no idea there was such a huge graduate student orientation process and were surprised at just how much goes on in those first weeks of school. But once

we adjusted and our family of four got used to being in a new space, we've all really enjoyed Ashdown life. Our kids particularly enjoy playing host and hostess to students when we have events in our apartment.



Introducing the New Housemasters (continued)

Question: Ashdown is the oldest and newest home to many graduate students. What are some changes you would like to make during your terms?

Answer: We like quite a lot about the existing traditions and culture of Ashdown. We'd love to encourage more use of the outdoor courtyard space, as we all love to be outdoors. In particular, Ben (our son) is a huge sports fan and would love to get folks participating in some sporting events. We've started what we hope will be one new tradition, which is our monthly birthday celebration (inviting those with birthdays each month to come by our place for cake and ice cream); these small gatherings are a great way for us to get to talk in greater depth with a few students each month. Beyond that, we're still in the data-gathering phase, so stay tuned...

Question: Has your professional experience been integrated into your role as housemasters?

Deirdre's Answer: I'm a clinical psychologist, so I can answer how my psychology training is integrated here. I enjoy the opportunities I have here to help people deal with problems and challenges, such as coping with the stress of grad school or working through conflicts with roommates.

Question: What's special about Ashdown that attracts you?

Answer: It's a great community - it struck us as a community with a good balance of fun-loving group spirit and respect for each resident's independence. Living here as housemasters has really helped us to feel much more part of the Institute. It's also fascinating to hear about all the amazing work in which students here are involved.

Catching Up with the Associate Housemasters

Although Ashdown welcomed new Housemasters over the summer, the community was all very pleased that Katie and Yuriy and their three sons, Max, Dante, and Apolo stayed on as Associate Housemasters. We have captured some of the highlights from our recent conversation with them here.

Question: What's some noticeable changes that Ashdown has experienced during your terms here?

Answer: The biggest change is certainly the transition from our former Housemasters, Ann and Terry, to our new Housemasters, Adam and Deirdre.



Ashdown's Associate Housemasters



Catching up (continued)

One of the great things about Ashdown House, however, is that even as the students and Housemasters change, traditions continue. It is these traditions--coffee hour, brunch, Thanksgiving dinner, orientation, the alumni dinner and concert--that make Ashdown the inviting community that it is.

Question: Would you like to share with us one special moment in your term as associate housemasters?

Answer: Our boys often like to run around and play in the second floor hallways. We are always impressed when students stop to play soccer, baseball, foosball, or tag with them.

The boys think of all 550 students as their "Ashdown friends," and playing with these friends makes them feel very special.

Question: What are some new things about Ashdown that would draw new residents to it?

Answer: One new addition is a communities officer. This person, Andy Wright, is an Ashdown officer who facilitates events among groups of people with a common interest. This summer, for example, there were many really great barbecues hosted by the grilling community.

Update from AHEC

In addition to catching up with the Housemasters, we also bring you updates from Jonas and Shabnam, two AHEC members. Jonas started his service in Ashdown as a Cherry Pie Officer. He sees being on AHEC as a unique opportunity to serve our community and make everyone's experience at Ashdown even better. Shabnam served as a Cultural officer before she joined AHEC. As a member of AHEC, she would be able to help this community get better and better. We recently asked them what they were working to improve around Ashdown. Here are their answers.

Jonas' Answer:

We currently have a shortage of common space compared with other grad dorms and it is not in a very good shape. I would like to make the common space in Ashdown cleaner and more comfortable. If possible, I would also want to get MIT housing to allocate more common space.

Another thing that needs attention is the noise problem. While we already started to enforce quiet hours, soundproofing also needs to be improved, especially for Thirsty Ear Pub and music room. I plan to devote significant resources to identifying and implementing possible solutions.



AHEC (from left to right): Jonas, Jordan, Evelina, Shabnam, and Misha



AHEC (continued)

Shabnam's Answer:

We have more than 500 neighbors in Ashdown, and it would be awesome to know all 500 of our neighbors! As an improvement, I would like to make sure that more and more people would become part of the community and get everyone to know each other. We are there to hear everyone's ideas for changes, improvements, and other things to be able to make Ashdown better and better every day.



4th of July BBQ

Ashdown's 4th of July Barbecue

On July 4th this year, Ashdown hosted an impressive Independence Day BBQ for all members of the MIT community. Despite the 4th being exceptionally hot this year, with temperatures over 90 degrees for most of the day, the BBQ was very well-attended with more than 200 people in attendance. The BBQ started at 4pm and within an hour, the main courtyard was full and people were trickling into the second courtyard to find a shaded spot on the grass or on the many benches that dot the periphery of the courtyard. Most students could be seen socializing with each other, their plates stacked with the delicious BBQ food, while some

while some others enjoyed games of Frisbee on the lawn. There was an extraordinary spread of food, ranging from hamburgers, hot dogs and veggie burgers to all kinds of cakes, pies and dessert items to refreshing fresh fruit including watermelon, cantaloupes and grapes.

Midway through the BBQ, Jordan Romvary, a member of the Ashdown House Executive Committee, did a spectacular reading of the entire Declaration of Independence. The crowds boomed at every indictment that was read, finally erupting in loud cheer at the final declaration. This reading was followed by a trivia contest about the American Revolutionary War; over 20 mini American flags were given out to winners who answered questions correctly. By 8pm, the BBQ wrapped up, with most folks heading up to the river to catch the fireworks display.



Jordan's Reading of the Declaration of Independence



Grad Unification Dance Party

The Ashdown Orientation Dance party, “Grad Unification” was held on Friday, August 30th. The floor in the Hulsizer room was studded with glittery decorations and played music from the 2000s. The Thirsty Ear Pub was reformed into a photo booth, which was intended to bring back childhood memories to students and to create conversation opportunities between them.



On the dance floor at Grad Unification



In the photo booth at Grad Unification

At the entrance, attendees were given party favors such as glowing sticks, necklaces. There was also a quiz session, in which guests could win a bottle of free beer after answering the question correctly.

There was one cash bar, as well as free pizzas, soft drinks and a chocolate fountain inside the dance floor. At the beginning, students were somewhat timid on the dance floors. But as the crowd grew larger, the dance floors also gained momentum. Overall, people had such a fantastic time that when the DJs ended the party at 1 a.m., a ubiquitous “boo” was heard everywhere.

Spring Concert and Dessert Night

Last spring Ashdown’s current residents and alumni gathered for an evening filled with music and delicious food at the Spring Concert and Dessert Night. Held on April 28th, the event began with a pre-dinner reception at the Thirsty Ear. A catered dinner in the Hulsizer room was next, followed by an hour-long concert featuring past and present MIT musicians. Attendees enjoyed piano solos and duets, a piece for both piano and violin, and several choral arrangements. The concert itself was dedicated to Ashdown’s newest alumni and departing Housemasters, Ann and Terry Orlando. The evening concluded with a catered dessert buffet in the Ashdown atrium that attracted so many residents that the line for baked goods extended nearly out the door!



Spring Concert (Continued)

While the Ashdown Alumni Committee enjoyed planning and attending last year's Spring Concert and Dessert Night and the event was well-attended by current residents, alumni attendance noticeably decreased compared to years past. As we begin planning next year's alumni event, we would love to get feedback from YOU, Ashdown's alumni, on how we can improve events in the future. Would you like to see the date of the event moved to earlier or later in the spring? What weekend dates and times work best (afternoons, evenings, Saturday vs Sunday, etc)? Do you have suggestions for alternate events to supplement the spring concert? Please send feedback to ashdown-alumni@mit.edu so we can get a better idea of how to plan events that are of interest to our valued Alumni!

Thanks and Happy Holidays!

Thanks for reading, Ashdown Alumni! Please stay tuned for news from us as we plan an Alumni event for the spring semester. Until then, please visit <http://ashdown.mit.edu> for news. As always, if you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact the current Alumni Officers at ashdown-alumni@mit.edu.



Rainbow over Ashdown (June 2013)