

### The Academic History of Hinman

One of the richest and most diverse examples of Hinman's pioneering spirit can be found in the academic courses offered through Hinman College. In the early days of Hinman's development, the newly created collegiate structure coupled with the administrative policy of decentralization allowed Hinman to develop and offer credit and noncredit courses to the residents of Hinman College. This initiative would allow the residents of Hinman to learn within the comfort of their own residential community with peers whom they all knew and lived with. This unique aspect of Hinman history is often overlooked because it no longer exists, but a splinter of its legacy lingers on in Hinman's living/learning community and its area-based courses.

Since nearly the very beginning of its existence, Hinman College, with the help of Master Gruber and the Hinman Faculty Fellows, strove to offer a wide variety of courses only to Hinman residents. On March 23, 1968, an all-day symposium was held to showcase the educational programs being considered by Hinman College. One idea being presented at this time was the Hinman Intense Semester. This program would offer Hinman residents an opportunity to gain 16 credits (a full semester's worth) by taking a cluster of courses from various academic disciplines that were prearranged by the College. Once a student signed up, these courses would be pre-registered into the student's schedule. The students enrolled in these courses would all take the same classes together at the same time. The idea was that, besides presenting a greater opportunity for students enrolled in the Hinman Intense Semester to bond with their classmates and do group related work, the course instructors would be encouraged to collaborate so that material learned in one course could be connected to another course,

enhancing the educational experience of the students. It was then proposed that students live in adjacent suites in the same building if they so chose.<sup>1</sup>

The Hinman Intense Semester would explore a theme selected by either the students or the faculty member. An example would be “Alienation in Modern Society” with appropriate courses in sociology, philosophy, general literature, and theater complementing one another.<sup>2</sup> Another option was to explore a period in detail such as the Age of Enlightenment with appropriate courses in history, philosophy, general literature, English, economics, and theater. There were other examples but the main point was that the Hinman Intense Semester was an opportunity for the students to not only academically bond with their fellow Hinmanites like never before but also to take a number cross-disciplinary courses that complemented one another in their content areas and added to the educational experience of the students.

Another idea presented during this symposium was the Hinman Free-Form Semester. This program would also be 16 credits and would be offered only to exceptionally bright students who would then engage in an independent study honors project. An instructor would interview each prospective student to determine if he or she had the ability to not only research and complete an independent project but also to teach the core content of those projects to other students. This academic program, while offering much leeway in areas a student wanted to study, would require a great deal of self-discipline and much effort.<sup>3</sup> In many ways the Hinman Free-Form Semester would be more intense than the Hinman Intense Semester.

There was also the Hinman Enriched-Lecture Course plan. In this plan the College would arrange for either a single faculty position or the equivalent payment in money that a single faculty position would cost. Once these funds were secure, the college would negotiate with faculty to offer specific courses that would be “enriched” by guest lecturers.<sup>4</sup>

The fourth plan outlined was the Hinman New Course. This particular plan envisioned Hinman College working with academic departments to offer three courses per year not listed in the Catalogue, but which would nevertheless receive college credit. Examples of this would be the political science department developing a specific course on the American Presidency specifically offered to Hinman residents. All of these innovative plans, depended upon not only cooperation from the various departments at the university but also the availability of funding for these programs.<sup>5</sup>

Faculty Master Gruber did not want to stop there. As early as November 1969, he had envisioned that by the Fall of 1970, Hinman would have academic programs that it would offer to its residents that would meet the all college requirements established by Harpur College. Experiment A called for a grouping of 100 level courses offered to Hinman freshmen and sophomores that would help to satisfy their all college requirements. He also imagined that an upper-level independent study project, called Experiment B, would also be offered. Experiment B would allow for a student to research and study a project of his or her choosing that would be independent and cross-disciplinary. “Unlike the traditional form of independent study completed under the close supervision of a single tutor, the Hinman experiment assumes that a few upperclass Harpur students are mature enough to devise acceptable projects and can carry them on without periodic tutoring.”<sup>6</sup>

On October 1, 1968, a survey was given to the residents of Hinman College to gauge their interest in a variety of academic programs that the College was planning on offering. Only 128 residents responded to the course, a pitiful number given the population of Hinman at the time was 937. Still, certain trends could be seen. The survey showed that students desired pre-arranged combinations of courses dealing with specific subject matter, such as some specific

courses in American History. It also noted a desire on the part of students to study Oriental philosophy and/or societies along with comparative religions of both the East and West. It stated the student's desire for more specialized courses offered at the 100 level without the prerequisites that most 200 level courses required.<sup>7</sup> The results of the survey show clearly that many Hinman residents were interested in courses such as Clinical Psychology, Negro History, and Anarchism. Interesting to note, only one student of the 128 surveyed said that he/she would be interested in a course on the stock market.<sup>8</sup> How times have changed.

Hinman also pioneered the idea of course descriptions. Pre-1970, students would register for a course with simply a title, time, and professor's name to go by. Little or no information on what material would be covered or the testing format of the course would be offered. By 1970, though, students in Hinman College voiced their displeasure over this to Master Gruber. Gruber then took it upon himself and threw all the resources of his office behind the effort to secure cooperation from all the academic departments at the university to make course descriptions a possibility. He solicited the help of all the department chairmen and the Dean of Harpur College himself all in an effort to make the lives of Hinman students a little bit easier. When the Hinman Pre-registration Course Bulletin came out in 1970 only about 15% of all the courses offered were covered. However, it was the start of near universal descriptions of courses that would be published in the Student Course Guide. The president even went on record stating that it would become university policy to have course descriptions for all classes being offered available to every student across campus.<sup>9</sup> Today, every course has a description about it online that students can access to help them make an informed decision about whether to register for it. Without the efforts of Pete Gruber and Hinman College this important development in Binghamton academics might never have become a reality.

Hinman also led the way in pioneering student-faculty interaction. A regular yet informal group discussion called Table Talk was held regularly in the Hinman Dining Hall. Table Talk was an event where students could meet with not only Master Gruber but Hinman Faculty Fellows and other faculty members from various departments to discuss a wide variety of issues that were agreed upon beforehand. Table Talk would occur during the dinner hours of the dining hall and all the parties could discuss the topic while they ate. Usually the conversations ran for about an hour but sometimes they would go on longer if the group was large or if the discussion was particularly interesting. Various topics were discussed from the uncontroversial such as the dedication of Harvey D. Hinman's portrait to Hinman College, to the present state of the university Sociology department, to the controversial and contentious issues of the day such as "Black Dissent."<sup>10</sup> Depending upon the topic of discussion, Table Talk would be a popular way for student and faculty to interact in an informal setting. While Table Talk would not last long after the departure of Pete Gruber from the position of Faculty Master, its legacy can still be seen in the Fellows' Lunches that are held every Friday at noon in the Hinman Dining Hall.

A memorandum written by Pete Gruber to the Masters' Council in October of 1972 outlined the Academic history of Hinman College up until that point. In the memo Gruber stated that, "Our constant effort to bring students, faculty, and academic programs together within Hinman College has produced literally hundreds of sparks if no huge beacon fires."<sup>11</sup> In the report he went on to outline some of the events that occur in Hinman on a regular basis. He spoke of round table discussions, a sort of early Hinman Fellows' lunch (or dinner) where students and faculty met in the Hinman Dining Hall at a specially built round table that seated ten people to discuss topics of mutual interest, such as the perennially popular Urban Studies course taught by Prof. Goertz. Also mentioned was that in 1971, 18 classes were held in student

lounges with the consent of both the students and the instructor. Hinman funds provided support for guest lecturers, films, poets, and other exhibitions. The Hinman staff also presented educational programs on drugs, health, prison reform, mental health and other interpersonal topics. Once a week, students and faculty fellows would meet in one of the building's main lounges to discuss an agreed-upon topic. Of particular note was the Hinman-pioneered idea of decentralized advising and career planning within the collegiate structure. The public school intern program and the pre-law club were extensions of this Hinman-pioneered concept. Hinman also held workshops in drama, photography (using its very own darkroom), poetry, folk singing, and chorus. It also sponsored its very own photographic exhibits, ecology exhibits, musicals, dramas, newspaper, and the first showing of Harpur original movies. Also sponsored by Hinman were academic retreats where on two Saturdays student academic interests were surveyed and discussed with over thirty faculty members. Hinman also, as mentioned earlier, initiated pre-registration of classes. Hinman also helped to develop a tutorial program where students in the subjects English, Math, Physics, and Chemistry were tutored by graduate students. "...the erection of the Innovational Project Board (IPB) in Spring of 1970 provided an efficient and responsible way for Hinman College to initiate student requested courses."<sup>12</sup> Hinman created a council made up of both students and faculty to screen course proposals and approved 18 courses for academic credit. Hinman also spearheaded undergraduate programs in Urban Studies and pioneered the Public School Practicum, which became established within the Masters of the Arts in Teaching (MAT) curriculum. Hinman also initiated human relations courses with input from clinical psychologists and added them to the pre-law curriculum. To top it all off, Hinman even made a children's literature course available. Gruber concluded his report by saying:

Had Hinman been provided modest and constant academic lines support, our formal academic programs would have developed in less haphazard fashions. Given the fragile

shoestring on which our formal academic programs have been suspended, the formal academic contributions by Hinman College have been, I believe, outstanding.<sup>13</sup>

Outstanding would be an understatement. Hinman College from 1968 to 1972 had, with very few resources, accomplished a Herculean task. They had provided a rich and diverse academic program to its residents and had in turn influenced the development of academics of Harpur College itself. Although these types of pioneering efforts in academics would not last much longer, the pioneering academic history of Hinman College is truly an extraordinary legacy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Christian P. Gruber, "Proposed Academic Plans for Hinman College," March 9, 1968, Hinman Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> C.P. Gruber, "Hinman College Academic Programming," memorandum to all faculty, November 4, 1969, Hinman Archives.

<sup>7</sup> C.P. Gruber, letter to President Dearing et al., October 29, 1968, *Brief Overview of Hinman College Development*, Hinman Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Results of Hinman College Survey on Academic Experimentation," November 5, 1968, Hinman Archives.

<sup>9</sup> C.P. Gruber, "The Mastership," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. III no. 11, November 16, 1972.

<sup>10</sup> C.P. Gruber, "Invitation to Dine: Table Talk at Hinman," Appendix 12 of *Brief Overview of Hinman College Development*, Hinman Archives.

<sup>11</sup> C.P. Gruber, "The 'Academic' History of Hinman College," memorandum to the Masters' Council, October 13, 1972, Hinman Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.