

Apartment-Style Living

Following up on the success of self-regulation and with the guidance and blessing of Hinman Faculty Master Pete Gruber, Hinman decided that it would push the envelope of social regulations even further. While self-regulation and open houses permitted men and women to mix with one another just about any time unsupervised, most buildings on campus were still only single sex buildings, that is men were assigned to one building, and women to another. In the case of Hinman College, one of wing of a building was designated solely for men, and another designated solely for women. The floor that you lived on would be filled with only residents of the same gender as yourself. The spring of 1970 would change all of that with the introduction of apartment-style living to Hinman.

Today when most people think of apartment-style living they think of real apartments with bedrooms, bathrooms and working kitchens. Many college campuses even boast this style of living for its students and it is a trend that is growing in popularity. Back in the early 1970's, though, apartment-style living was the idea that members of the opposite sex (while remaining in suites filled with only their particular gender) to live on the same floor. The goal of apartment-style living was to make coed housing a permanent reality. Proponents of apartment-style living argued that this type of living arrangement would more closely mimic the reality of living in a real apartment complex outside the university. They also stated that while certainly some sexual activity would occur between male and female residents on the same floor, it would not differ from what was already occurring with the self-regulation and open houses. Furthermore, they argued that close proximity to members of the opposite sex would better prepare both genders for the outside world where casual, friendly, platonic male-female relations were the norm. To sum up, the argument for those who favored apartment-style living stated that it more closely

resembled the “real world” and that just because a suite of male students would be living next door to a suite of female students, this did not mean that both suites would automatically stop studying to engage in sexual intercourse. The relationships that would be forged, supporters of apartment-style living argued, would be close, but mostly platonic.¹

The experiment in apartment-style living in Hinman began in the winter of 1970. On January 22, 1970, Pete Gruber sent a memorandum to then president of the university Bruce Dearing supporting the case for apartment-style living arrangements. In the memorandum, Gruber stated the students of Hughes Hall, with the approval of HCC and the [Faculty] Masters’ Council and working closely with the residence hall staff, wished to experiment in apartment-style living for the Spring of 1970 semester. In the memo, Gruber pitched apartment-style living as a way to “encourage casual, mature, non-dating contacts between men and women living in the hall.”² Gruber correctly prophesized that this type of living arrangement would allow for casual mixing and socialization of random strangers in the hall of both sexes and would more closely mimic that of apartments off campus, and most importantly that it would “aid students in bridging the gap between their home environment and the normal ‘outside world’ environment for which students are preparing themselves both in and outside the classrooms.”³

Gruber would also argue that apartment-style living would increase the security of the building. Having male students on every floor would be a deterrent to intruders believing that they could prey easily upon defenseless female residents. He also stated that he believed that by mixing the two genders certain problems would be avoided such as noise and “masculine rowdiness.”⁴ Gruber believed that with females present on the same floor, male residents would be less likely to engage in forms of unruly conduct. He, like many others, believed that males would modulate their behavior so as not to harm the sensibilities of the fairer sex. In other

words, men would offer security for the women, while the women, simply by being present in close proximity to men, would regulate the juvenile behavior of the men.⁵

Gruber, ever the practical Faculty Master, clearly outlined his plan to gradually implement this radical living arrangement in Hinman. First, it would be confined to four of the six floors in Hughes Hall. Four floors would be integrated, and two would remain segregated by gender. All the Hughes Hall residents involved in the experiment would be volunteers and anyone not willing to participate in the experiment would be accommodated. Transfer students would be placed in exclusively men's or women's floor unless they volunteered to be a part of the experiment. Also, Gruber assured President Dearing that no exceptions to current social regulations would occur in the course of the experiment. Gruber also assured Dearing that no wide-scale implementation of apartment-style living would occur until the experiment was thoroughly evaluated by Hinman College staff members, Faculty Fellows, and Hinman residents.

Evaluation of the experiment would be as thorough as possible. Gruber outlined four areas that would be looked at specifically:

- a. A comparison of grade point averages of students in the second semester to their previous grade point averages.
- b. Evidence of increased or decreased use of psychological services by the participants.
- c. Results of resident student-sociology faculty designed questionnaires [designed by students and the sociology faculty] to be administered to those participating in the experiment.
- d. Comparison of results of our experiment with [the] experience of Goodyear Residence Hall of SUNY-Buffalo which has been similarly arranged since last September and with

the experience on the Stanford University campus which has operated co-red residence halls for several years.⁶

Gruber did not hesitate to list his hopes for the future. He hoped that if all went well, then apartment-style living would be implemented all over Hinman. He did note that it would be advisable, even if the experiment was a success, for certain floors to remain segregated for students who wished to live on a single-sex floor and that no freshman should be allowed to live apartment-style without parental permission.⁷

For over a month, Gruber and the rest of Hinman College waited to hear what President Dearing would say. Would he approve or disapprove this radical measure? Dearing, unlike some future university presidents, was not afraid of controversy. Later that year he would lead a procession of thousands of people from campus all the way to the Binghamton Courthouse in the largest antiwar march in Binghamton history.⁸ Still, with the suggestions of apartment-style living following up on the heels of the recently enacted self-regulation and open houses, many worried that Hinman was pushing for another radical measure far too soon. Their fears were quelled when on March 10, 1970, in a letter to Pete Gruber, President Dearing authorized Gruber to proceed with the experiment in apartment-style living.⁹ By mid-semester the students had moved in and began the grand experiment in apartment-style living in Hinman.

As the semester neared completion it became time to evaluate the progress of the experiment. On May 15, Mary Deci, the Head Resident of Hughes Hall, wrote a memo to Dr. Gruber outlining her initial findings in the experiment in apartment-style living. The full text of the document is as follows:

We had an all dorm meeting about a month ago to evaluate the experiment. All of the feelings that came out were very positive. People felt that this type of an arrangement was more natural, more comfortable, and made it possible for everyone to get to know more people, in and out of the dorm.

Even some of those people who did not want to be in the experiment originally spoke out for both the good of the experiment, and their regrets for not being in it.

An interesting course was evolved from the meeting. Everyone almost assumed that it was good, and they were interested how to preserve the arrangement for next semester. A committee was set up to look into this.

I could not find anyone to make a negative statement concerning the experiment. There seems to be a sizeable group whose interactions have not been altered to any great extent by the experiment. The vast majority is in favor of the changes it has brought about. No one is displeased with it. I can see no reason for not setting it up as a permanent living arrangement.¹⁰

Three days after Deci's evaluation was sent to Gruber, Dr. Gruber sent his own memo to President Dearing reporting the findings of the evaluation. Gruber also presented his view on what should happen next. Although he initially was for discontinuing the experiment in the fall regardless of whether it was a success or not, with the clear overwhelming support of the residents in Hughes Hall, Gruber petitioned Dearing to allow for apartment-style living to become permanent not only in Hughes Hall but in all of Hinman College.

The Hinman College Council, after it has evaluated the Hughes experiment in the Fall, and has submitted its formal, written recommendation to the Council of the State University of New York at Binghamton, shall be authorized to curtail or expand this experiment to other Hinman residences (and to resume the apartment-style living arrangements within Hughes Hall) on the basis of its findings unless the Council within one month of its receipt of the college recommendation formally asks for a delay in the implementation of the College Council's decision.¹¹

With the permission of President Dearing and the SUNY Binghamton Council, and the approval in the fall by the Hinman College Council to expand the experiment, apartment-style living would come to every building in Hinman by Thanksgiving 1970.¹²

In the Fall of 1970, it seemed as though apartment-style living was poised to become a permanent feature of Hinman. However, national and global events had conspired to delay slightly the implementation of apartment-style living. The expansion of the Vietnam War into

Cambodia and the Kent State Massacre on May 4, 1970, caused a great deal of student unrest around the country and SUNY Binghamton was not immune. Many students were more concerned with protesting the war than filling out questionnaires about apartment-style living. However, by September 21, 1970, Pete Gruber felt that enough information had been gathered to submit a final report to President Dearing on the Hughes Hall experiment in apartment-style living. The writer of this report was a young resident counselor (a position later to be known as resident assistant) from Hughes Hall named Val Washington.¹³

Washington supplied a detailed questionnaire that was submitted to the residents on the four floors where the experiment took place, the two floors that did not partake in the experiment, and two other halls in Hinman that acted as a control group. A special questionnaire was given to the residents of the four experimental floors in addition to the regular survey given to everyone. Space was given for additional comments on the experiment as well. Washington did note that a large number of residents did not participate in the survey because they were engaged in antiwar protests, had gone home, or had simply failed to fill out the survey. Although she warned that sweeping generalizations could not be made based on the largely incomplete data, the results were considered valuable in showing trends in the attitudes of the students towards apartment-style living.¹⁴

Some of the findings of the report were startling. For instance, in the control dorms, 21% of the respondents answered the question "How do you feel toward your dorm?" with either "I dislike it" or "I dislike it intensely." In the experimental dorms 90% responded to this question with either "I like it" or "I like it a lot." In another portion of the questionnaire students were asked to circle words or phrases that described how they felt about their dorm. There were desirable words such as "happy," "warm," or "friendly" and undesirable words such as

“depressing”, “cold”, “apathetic” as well as neutral words such as “noisy”, “quiet”, or “chaotic.” In Hughes, 62% of the respondents classified their dorm as happy and only 3% as depressing. The control dorms found that only 29% found their dorm to be happy and that 8% found it to be depressing. The neutral phrases has mixed results, with 42% of the experimental floors of Hughes believing their dorm to be noisy, while 32% of the control dorms felt the same way about their dorms.¹⁵ While the findings of the questionnaire did leave some unanswered questions, the results were overwhelmingly clear. Students in Hinman much preferred to live in an apartment-style living arrangement.

Included was also an evaluation on the experiment by Larry Moran, a resident counselor on the Hughes Hall north wing, second floor, one of the experimental floors. In his report, Moran would write,

From this counselor’s point of view the experiment has proven itself to have a significant effect on floor interaction...I have observed that several very close-knit suites have chosen to relinquish the privacy they had previously sought within their own rooms for the openness of the floor lounge...A measure of the community spirit which evolved on the floor was the unusual circumstance of several well attended floor meetings and one very successful party planned entirely by the residents.¹⁶

Besides the development of community spirit, Moran also cited the psychological benefits of having a mixed gender floor. “In Hughes Hall this semester, the presence of listening and sympathetic students of opposite sexes on the same floor has greatly facilitated the position of the counselor.”¹⁷ Moran also stated his belief that freshmen potentially had the most to benefit from this type of living arrangement. He related a story where a freshman male student entered the university and had a difficult time coping with his new surroundings. Even after psychological counseling was sought he still had problems adjusting and withdrew from the university. Moran stated his opinion, “I feel that had this student and his floor been exposed to the influence of a Co-ed floor a suitable adjustment might have been made. It seems that the

experiment situation does work favorably to speed up that aspect of emotional development which comes with a broadening of personal experiment. I have not seen any new problems for freshmen which have arisen as a result of the experiment.”¹⁸

The experiment also benefited upperclassmen. Moran cited an increasing maturity in the social interactions of his residents which he attributed to the introduction of apartment-style living. A living arrangement that more closely resembled the non-collegiate world had profound positive effects upon the residents of Hughes Hall.¹⁹

The only reservation that Moran felt toward the experiment was that it should have been conducted in the fall and not in the spring. This was because, as a resident counselor, he had to reestablish his authority halfway through the year which, as any current resident assistant can attest, is especially challenging. He summed up his feelings by stating,

To sum up my feelings about the experiment I would have to say that Apartment-Style Living has shown itself to be natural, practical, psychologically healthful and perfectly adaptable for the Hinman College dormitories. I would highly recommend that it be implemented throughout the complex as soon as possible during the coming semester with the exception of one hall which should be maintained as a traditional dormitory for those students who would prefer to live there.²⁰

Along with Moran’s evaluation of the experiment in apartment-style living, Val Washington also presented her personal opinions on the experiment. In her opening paragraph she stated unequivocally, “In my opinion the Hughes Experiment in Apartment-Style Living was a success. As a student I enjoyed my floor more than any other floor I had lived on, and as a counselor I felt more like a friend than a proctor.”²¹ She explained that the floor lounge, typically unused in the traditional single sex living arrangement, was almost always occupied with members of the opposite sex engaging in conversation, games, and other activities. “There was rarely a night when the lounge was empty and the atmosphere was generally friendly and open.”²² The experiment allowed Washington to excel in her job as counselor for the floor. She

would write, "...I usually kept my door open and, unlike my first semester in Hughes, people would walk in and out asking to borrow a book, sharing cookies from home or wine from the Spirit Shoppe,* and just talking. I felt very comfortable with most of the kids on the corridor...I began to feel the floor was a whole, rather than a group of semi-closed suites."²³

Like Moran, Val Washington would describe the atmosphere on her floor as being natural. While there certainly were feelings of sexual attraction on the floor, the general feeling was mostly that of familiar relations and not sexual relations. Washington related a story where one of the boys on her floor would have wanted to date a girl on the floor but couldn't because "she was too much like a sister."²⁴ For members of the floor, especially those who were more introverted or shy, this was a great way to have a cordial, non-sexual relationship with a member of the opposite sex. These types of platonic relationships built confidence in every member of the floor and allowed all the floor-mates to understand that everyone, both male and female, were thinking feeling human beings with similar dreams, desires and emotions.

She also explained that more and more residents from around the building and not just on her floor began to visit her in the office and that the same experience held true for her fellow counselors. Many nights in the Hughes office numerous counselors would keep her company as would many residents from around the building. This mixing of the floor had the unexpected effect of bringing not just individual floors together, but the entire population of the building together.²⁵

Washington also shot down the concern that because she was a woman, the men on her floor would not open up to her (the same fear existed for female residents on a male counselor's floor). She stated that the boys on her floor were very willing to open up to her and in particular many of the freshmen boys would spend time in her room either talking with her, conversing

* The legal drinking age at this time was 18.

with other residents while she worked, or playing Jeopardy, which was a favorite pastime on her floor. She ended her report by writing, “I do think that coed floors are a very good thing. In my experience it was fun and beneficial as well. I hope that Hinman will begin instituting ‘apartment-style’ living in at least one dorm—if not all five.”²⁶ With the statistical data backing up the evaluations of both Larry Moran and Val Washington, the only thing Hinman could do now was to wait and see how the President would respond.

In a letter from President Dearing to Pete Gruber dated September 28, 1970, Dearing wrote what he thought about the matter of apartment-style living. In the letter Dearing stated that, “It is heartening to observe that there is so much enthusiasm for this essay in making the dormitory situation agreeable, and that there appear to be few if any strongly negative aspects.”²⁷ He also said that he concurred with Gruber that further analysis was needed before a final recommendation or change in policy could take place but that he agreed that the experiment should continue.

In late October and early November of 1970, questionnaires were passed out in every hall in Hinman to gauge the interest in apartment-style living. Based on this each building would have a referendum in which every resident had a chance to vote on whether or not he/she favored apartment-style living. Then it would be decided if the experiment would be expanded outside Hughes Hall. Included during all of this would be panel discussions where interested students could hear from students who had participated in apartment-style living in Hughes and ask them questions.²⁸

On November 4, 1970, Faculty Master Gruber sent a memo to Vice President Gordon outlining his desires concerning apartment-style living. In his memo he outlined his plan to incorporate apartment-style living arrangements throughout Hinman College. It is important to

note that he did make it clear that it was up to the student body to accept apartment-style living and that it would only work by consent. According to Gruber, no one should be forced to move onto a mixed-sex floor if they did not desire to do so. It was Gruber's hope that by the spring of 1971 all of Hinman would be following the apartment-style living arrangement.²⁹

On November 6, 1970, Mary C. Richardson, the Associate Dean for Student Affairs wrote a letter to Vice President Gordon outlining the current progress of apartment-style living in Hinman and chronology of its events. The letter also expressed Gruber's desire to meet with Gordon to discuss the matter of implementing apartment-style living all across Hinman in the near future.³⁰

Although the exactly what went on during that meeting will probably never be known, the meeting between Dr. Gruber and Vice President Gordon was successful. In a letter Vice President Gordon dated November 19, 1970 Mary Richardson stated, "As was decided at our meeting of November 19, 1970, Mr. Gruber will proceed to implement the proposal on Apartment House Style Living in Hinman College, which was outlined in his memo of November 4, 1970."³¹ Gruber's efforts were a success. Apartment-style living arrangements would eventually come to every building in Hinman and every floor would have both male and female suites. This trend would also sweep across campus to the other residential colleges and to this day the vast majority of the floors on campus are coed.

Although apartment-style living became very popular with most of the residents of Hinman College, there still were some problems and internal snafus that needed to be worked out. Bob Giomi remembers one such problem during his time as Head Resident of Lehman Hall. One year during opening weekend when all the students including new freshmen were eagerly moving into their new rooms, a very irate mother approached Bob complaining that she did not

want her daughter living in coed housing. Bob tried to explain to her that there were male and female suites and that only the floors were coed. The mother persisted that a young man was living in the same suite as her daughter. Bob investigated it and discovered that this was true. A young man by the name of Leslie had been assigned to a female suite. Somehow the people in charge of housing must have made a mistake, most likely seeing the name Leslie and thinking it was a girl. Bob cleared up the problem and Leslie moved into a male suite, deeply saddened that he would not be sharing a room with a girl.³²

It would seem to the outside observer that Hinman was blazing a trail not only of social reform but also of fearless experimentation in many other areas. The Hinman College Council, the college's student government, was setting the example of what a student government should be.[†] The pioneering spirit of Hinman and its residents would not stop at apartment-style living though. On March 30, 1971, Gruber and a group of interested students presented their ideas on another experiment that they would conduct in Hinman. Among their suggestions would be a hall that permitted pets, a co-op dorm where students would do their own cleaning and maintenance, a hall that would be furnished entirely by students and painted anyway they wished, a cooking dorm where the students could be exempt from the meal plan, a dorm which would permit the cooking of unprepared dining hall food but residents would still remain on the meal plan, a dorm for married undergraduate students, and in what many would consider a step backwards, a dorm that would impose strict quiet hours and a restricted open house.³³ Obviously not all of these experimental dorms would be implemented and the few that did would not last. However, Hinman had been bitten by the bug of pioneering spirit. The staff and students of Hinman were fearlessly blazing a new trail through the frontier of experimental living.

[†] The development and legacy of HCC will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter.

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- ¹ Martha Weinman Lear, "When College Dorms Go Coed," *Readers Digest*, February 1970.
- ² C.P. Gruber, "A Second Semester Experiment in Apartment-Style Living," memorandum to President Dearing, January 22, 1970.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ McFee, *The Cornerstone*, 149.
- ⁹ President Bruce Dearing to Dr. Christian P. Gruber, Master, March 10, 1970, Hinman Archives.
- ¹⁰ Mrs. Mary Deci, "Evaluation of Experiment in Apartment-Style Living," memorandum to Dr. C.P. Gruber, May 15, 1970.
- ¹¹ C.P. Gruber, "The Hughes Hall Experiment in Apartment-Style Living," memorandum to President Dearing, May 18, 1970.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ C.P. Gruber, "Questionnaire Evidence on the Hughes Experiment in Apartment-style Living," memorandum to President Dearing, September 21, 1970.
- ¹⁴ Val Washington, "Analytical and Statistical Data of the Hughes Hall Experiment in Apartment-Style Living," September 12, 1970.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Larry Moran, "Student Counselor Evaluation: An Experiment in Apartment Style Living," Hinman Archives.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Val Washington, "Personal Evaluation of Experiment in Apartment-Style Living, 1970," Hinman Archives.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ President Bruce Dearing to C.P. Gruber, September 28, 1970, Hinman Archives.
- ²⁸ Pat Carretta, "Coed Floors," memorandum to Hinman Residents, October 30, 1970, Hinman Archives.
- ²⁹ C.P. Gruber, "Apartment-Style Living in Hinman College," memorandum to Vice President Gordon, November 4, 1970, Hinman Archives.
- ³⁰ Mary C. Richardson, "Hinman College's Experiment in Apartment Style Living," letter to Vice President Gordon, November 6, 1970, Hinman Archives.
- ³¹ Mary Richardson, "Apartment House Style Living," letter to Vice President Gordon, November 19, 1970, Hinman Archives.
- ³² Bob Giomi, telephone conversation with author, November 29, 2006.
- ³³ "Experimental Dorm," March 30, 1971, Hinman Archives.