

Self-Regulation

The idea of self-regulation is the cornerstone of the pioneering spirit of Hinman. Prior to 1966 and the implementation of collegiate structure, most of the halls on campus were restricted to following the policies and procedures established by higher university administration. To the student of today, many of these policies and procedures seem draconian, completely restricting personal liberty. However, in the mid-1960's these conservative policies would be the norm on college and university campuses across the country.

During this time period most dormitories in the United States were segregated by sex. The idea of coed housing was not even on the radar of most students, let alone university officials. Furthermore, who could enter into a certain dorm and at what time were strictly controlled. Rigid guidelines towards legal drugs and alcohol were enforced. Student self-government was not an issue because, for the most part, it did not exist and if it did it did not have the power to execute lasting change. While student suggestions on reform may have been considered, the student body certainly did not have much of a voice overall in reforming their college or university. That's the way it was for most of the history of higher education in the United States up until the 1960's.

The 1960's in American culture was a decade full of popular unrest (especially among the student body in institutes of higher education) with many groups seeking radical social change regarding civil rights, women's rights, and more liberal attitudes on illegal narcotics, to name just a few. Enter into this equation an unpopular war in Vietnam and the scene was set for an explosive confrontation between forces of the old conservative establishment on one side and the mostly young liberal reform movements on the other. This struggle for moral and political superiority took place all across the nation at virtually every level of society. Colleges and

universities were no exception and in fact were usually hotbeds of student activism and unrest. The State University of New York at Binghamton was no exception.

During this time, some liked to call SUNY Binghamton “the Berkley of the East” because of the high amount of political activism, especially anti-Vietnam War protests.¹ Still, in comparison to other centers of student activism in the 1960’s, the activism of the students at SUNY Binghamton was comparatively mild. However, it was in this era of liberal thinking and reforms that new attitudes on many longstanding university policies began to take place, particularly in the area of social regulations. One of the largest social regulations to be challenged appeared in a movement to create self-regulating halls.

Up until this point, males and females were separated from each other either by living in completely different buildings or in different wings of the same building, such as the case was in Hinman. If a male student wanted to visit a female student or vice versa in their particular room, first their door had to be kept open at all times and furthermore their visit was either closely monitored or not allowed at all.² This was all done in an effort to prevent premarital sexual intercourse from occurring. Most university officials at Binghamton and in other colleges and universities believed that most students were too immature to engage in sexual intercourse at this stage in their lives. The Sexual Revolution was sweeping the nation at this time and attitudes concerning sex were gradually beginning to change. That was all about to change with the introduction of self-regulated student housing.

In April 1966, Mary C. Richardson, the Associate Dean of Students, wrote a statement regarding the university’s view on issues such as self-regulation to the Self Regulating Hall Committee. In her statement, she made it clear that the university’s goal, of disseminating information and educating its students was still its primary goal and in order for the university to

continue in its quest to reach this goal certain policies, regulations and guidelines had to be maintained and enforced. She went on to write that everyone within the university, particularly those in the residence halls, had an obligation to follow rules set forth by the university in order to maintain these standards and to protect both community and individual rights. She also made it clear that the university was willing to allow the idea of a self-regulating hall as an avenue to maintain and expand these high standards. She wrote, “The opportunity to help individuals develop concern for others, personal integrity, and self-discipline is evident in your philosophy of a self-regulating hall...”³

Richardson would continue in her statement to outline some concerns that the committee would need to address as it investigated the possibility of creating a self-regulating hall. One of the most important concerns that needed to be addressed was the curfew on women that was in place at the time. Women in student housing were not allowed to leave the building from late at night until sometime early the next morning. These regulations were imposed by the university in an effort to prevent premarital intercourse. There were ways around the rules, for juniors or seniors in good academic standing who could borrow a key to come and go as they pleased. Still, most women were confined to their building during certain hours of the day, a restriction that their male counterparts did not have. In her statement, Richardson wrote that curfews would continue to be enforced until self-regulation had been implemented in hall for at least one semester.⁴ Though she offered no guarantees, she hinted that the entire idea of a women’s curfew could be dropped if the experiment in self-regulation was successful. Hinman would be the first residential college to experiment with self-regulation.

Closely linked to the idea of self-regulation was the idea of open houses. Open houses were in essence the outcome of self-regulation. An open house, as opposed to a regulated house,

would have no restrictions to when members of the opposite sex could visit one another in their individual buildings and rooms. Open houses would also permit room doors to be closed, lights to be turned off etc. when members of the opposite sex were visiting. However, one source of contention was whether open houses should be 24 hours a day seven days a week or limited to certain hours of the day or to certain days, such as the weekends. Peter Lorenzi, a Hinman resident at this time, remembers the former policy of self-regulation and open houses. "At 11:00 pm until 7:00 am all entrances between each wing of the building would be locked. Women had keys to their wing but men weren't allowed into the female wing unescorted."⁵ While the university was strict in enforcing this policy, Peter does remember well-established informal networks where somewhat surreptitiously women would sneak their boyfriends over to their side and vice versa.

In her document, Richardson reiterated the university policy:

While the University recognizes the student's needs for interpersonal privacy it does not condone pre-marital intercourse on University property. Neither does it condone the use of certain drugs or illegal behavior of any kind.

The University feels that potential psychological and emotional effects of pre-marital intercourse pose a danger to certain individuals and hence the entire University community. It is felt that students at Harpur are capable of realizing these potential dangers and of creating an atmosphere in which a healthy interpersonal privacy will exist without psychological and emotional maladjustment. Therefore, the self-regulating hall will have the power to set the number and times of open house events, as well as all rules pertaining to doors, lights, and supervision. The residents of the dorm are themselves responsible for their conduct and the hall's reputation.⁶

Richardson, while reiterating the university disapproval of premarital sexual intercourse, was effectively allowing each hall the authority to decide how strictly they would run their open houses and how many open houses they would permit.

These were the most important issues discussed in the document, but the role and conduct of the resident counselor (now known as the resident assistant) was discussed as well. This

aspect of the history will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter. When Cleveland Hall opened in the fall of 1967, it was the first hall on campus to adhere to the policy of self-regulation. By all accounts, this policy was wildly popular with the student body and very successful. So successful in fact that students from across the university led a protest in May of 1968 demanding that the university implement 24-hour open houses and self-regulation across the campus.⁷ Eventually the university concurred and self-regulation with 24-hour open houses became the norm all over campus.

The importance of this to Hinman history is evident in the fact that Cleveland Hall led the way through this frontier of social regulations. Every time a young male or young female student goes to the room of a member of the opposite sex they can give thanks to Cleveland Hall for being the pioneer in reforming social regulations at SUNY Binghamton.

¹ Gabe Yankowitz, e-mail message to author, January 25, 2007.

² Michele McFee, *The Cornerstone*, (Harpur College of Arts and Sciences, State University of New York at Binghamton, 2000), 119.

³ Mary Richardson, "General Statement of the Self Regulating Hall Committee," (State University of New York Binghamton, April 4, 1966), 1.

⁴ Richardson, "General Statement," 2.

⁵ Peter Lorenzi, telephone conversation with author, January 19, 2007.

⁶ Richardson, "General Statement," 2.

⁷ McFee, *The Cornerstone*, 148.