HCC in the Mid-1970’s

Following the winter hiatus, HCC President Stan Ruszkowski wrote an open letter to all the residents of Hinman College. His letter in part:

…This semester can be a really great one for everybody in Hinman if everyone would be willing to put a little time and effort into the various Hinman activities. Many students feel that this is exclusively the job of the Hinman Council; nothing could be farther from the truth. The members of Hinman Council are not elitists as I have often heard them called, but rather they are students who have shown an active interest in our college and its affairs. If more students would devote a little time and participation into Hinman affairs by serving on committees or helping out at Hinman functions, more would get accomplished and bigger and better activities could be planned. Many students complain about the lack of social affairs going on in the college, but very few students have been willing to do anything about it. If many people would devote just a little effort much more would get accomplished than having a few people doing everything.

…I hope you will not just read this and then not do anything about it. Why not use a little of your free time and help out. You’ll feel good about doing it and everyone will have an enjoyable time. With constructive ideas and participation from everyone, I promise this to be the best semester Hinman has ever seen...

Ruszkowski, like his predecessors, was looking to make Hinman a more enjoyable place for those that lived there. One of the ways he wanted to accomplish this goal was through the offshoot of the Social Committee. This new committee known as the Socially Inconceivable Committee (SIC) was one way they hoped to accomplish this goal. SIC, which was the brainchild of Mark Wenger, was headed up by Social Vice President John Sutton who hoped to implement new and interesting social activities along with old staples like free movies, ice cream parties, and everyone’s absolute favorite, beer parties. One of the first large-scale programs that SIC introduced was a dance party in the Hinman Commons with live music. Not only was this program highly successful, it was also reasonably inexpensive. With successes like this, SIC was on the track to bring more social activities to Hinman without breaking the bank.

As a committee, SIC became very popular. At the first meeting close to twenty people turned out to help out with the committee. During the course of the meeting, many ideas were
brainstormed on how to make Hinman a more socially active residential college. Some ideas that were proposed included a mystery bus ride, a semi-formal dance, and a dance marathon. In a humorous moment, an orgy in Bob Giomi’s apartment was suggested; however, that idea was thrown out due to a lack of willing participants.³

Later into the semester, John Sutton announced his resignation from the position of Social Vice President. During the semester, Sutton, who was also an RA, put on many programs and was instrumental in giving Hinman a rebirth in social programming. However, Sutton noted that he could not be an effective RA and be a part of HCC E-Board at the same time. At around the same time Mark Wenger, Hinman Treasurer, also resigned, opening two positions on the HCC E-Board.⁴

Before his resignation Sutton set in motion what would become a long standing Hinman tradition: the semi-formal dance. The Semi-Formal, which was held in the Hinman Dining Hall, had all the hallmarks of the Semi-Formals of today. There was music, a buffet diner and unlimited mixed drinks (which have been eliminated from today’s semi-formals). Tickets were sold at the price of $6 per couple and $4 for singles. The theme of the first annual Hinman Semi-Formal held in April 1974 was “Spring Fling.”⁵ By all accounts, the Semi-Formal was an astounding success with Faculty Master Vito Sinisi writing “The First Annual Hinman College Semi-formal Dinner Dance was a ball! To everyone in planning and carrying out the Dance—my congratulations and thanks. You’ve established another Hinman tradition! I look forward to the Second, Third,…Annual Semi-formal Dinner Dance.”⁶

The end of the 1973-1974 academic year saw much in the way of social development in HCC. Besides the popular and successful Semi-Formal there were also a dance marathon which lasted nearly fourteen hours. Steve Young also came up with the idea to tape music for parties,
which helped to cut down on the costs of a live band. John Sutton discovered that Hinmanites didn’t always need beer to party, that they could have just as much of a good time if the atmosphere and the social setting was right. In the realm of HCC beyond social areas, a Finance Committee was created to make a fairer distribution of monies from Hinman. This year HCC truly came into its own. In the past, HCC had been viewed with some ambivalence by the residents of Hinman College. Granted, turnout during the elections was just as low this year as in previous years, but for the most part elected officials did their job to the best of their abilities and put on numerous programs that greatly benefited the lives of Hinmanites. HCC was beginning to become more than just an honorary institution. It was beginning to become an asset to Hinman College.

The first HCC meeting of the 1974-1975 academic year was very well attended. Hinman student government representatives were all eager to start off the new year and begin working to make Hinman a better place. That year, the budget in Hinman was a whopping $17,000. Even for this time period, it was an exorbitant sum. Everyone in HCC drooled over the great programs that would be possible with this generous amount of money. During that meeting, $150 of that total was allocated to the ever-popular Hinman bartending course. Hinman had a lot of cash to throw around that year and everyone in HCC was looking forward to putting it to good use.

Controversy soon arose. Not over allocation of funds, but over what would become a seemingly never-ending source of debate and contention in HCC to this very day. Since the opening banquet back in 1967, the Hinman Dining Hall has been criticized for long lines, poor service, and inedible food. The company that managed the dining hall at that time, ACE, proposed that they would begin issuing fines between $25 to $100 for those caught stealing food. Many students claimed that this was unfair and that the penalties did not match the severity of
the crimes. Another issue that arose concerned plans in the to build a staircase in the University Union to connect the bookstore (which was in the Old Union at the time) with the rest of the Union. HCC voted against this proposal, claiming that the staircase would do little to improve service and that the steep price tag ($10,400) did not justify its construction.8

Other issues hit even closer to home. Social Vice President Vinnie Pantuso suddenly resigned his position and President Stan Ruszkowski asked Scott Salvie to fill in for the remainder of the semester. Salvie entered into the position as a favor, but was angered with the reasons why Pantuso left, chiefly that student apathy in light of all their hard work was getting to him. Salvie lashed out at the greater Hinman community in a open letter to all Hinman students. His letter read in part:

As everyone knows by now, Vinnie Pantuso has resigned the position of Social Vice-President of Hinman College. Stan Ruskowski [sic] asked me if I would be willing to fill this position for the rest of the semester. I agreed, albeit with some misgivings, based largely upon the feelings that seem to be prevalent in Hinman today.

I sense a feeling of disappointment and apathy throughout the college this year. What this feeling is due to, I’m not exactly sure. What I am sure of however, is that it must change. Elected officers of this college are resigning their positions; candidates for dorm positions ran unopposed in the beginning of this semester—indicating to me that no one gave a shit.

Most of Hinman’s events for the rest of this semester were already planned when I assumed office—there will be almost none that I will plan. To make these ideas and events work, however, I need help. It can’t be done with only a few people, many are needed.

Phil Ochs has a verse in his song “Outside a Small Circle of Friends” that goes like this:

Riding down the highway
Yes my back is getting stiff,
13 cars are piled up.
They’re hanging on a cliff,
Maybe we should pull them back with our towing chain

But we gotta move and we might get sued
And it looks like it’s gonna rain
And I’m sure it wouldn’t interest
Anybody—outside a small circle of friends.

That point, I think is obvious.

Get off you [sic] collective fat asses and help out; Hinman life will only be what YOU make it.

Salvie had a legitimate gripe. An ever-increasing problem in Hinman then, as now, was student apathy. HCC had been trying for years to get more Hinmanites involved in their community by joining student government.

Student apathy was not the only problem facing HCC and the rest of Hinman College.

Roosevelt Hall Secretary Jule Barad wrote this scathing editorial in the November 7, issue of *Hinman Halitosis*:

On Tuesday night, November 5, Lou Illiano justifiably assumed the “dictatorship” of Roosevelt Hall. Many of you may be outraged at such a seemingly arrogant gesture on the part of Lou. “Why, what right does he have to suddenly assume complete control of Roosevelt Hall?”, you may ask?

Having attended the Dorm Council meetings on a somewhat regular basis, I have seen the indifference and apathy that has permeated every issue discussed, every vote taken. When Lou has asked for volunteers for committees to organize parties etc., he has been met with blank faces and vague commitments. Whatever dorm functions have occurred are due practically in total to Lou’s personal efforts, with the help of possibly a few friends. That Lou could assemble more “Rowdie Townies” than Roosevelt dorm residents for a Roosevelt Dorm Council meeting is indicative of the apathy which exists.

Dorm Council itself is not a fault. Everyone knows when the meetings are held and that anyone is welcome to contribute ideas. It is like pulling teeth to get even some of the floor representatives to come to the meetings, let alone regular dorm residents. The Halloween Party was disastrous. Some have blamed Lou, Cheryl Eller or the Dorm Council. However, it is not the fault of the people who come to the meetings and who have attempted to get things organized. Blame is to be placed on those who have not cared enough to come to the meetings at all, although they have felt qualified to criticize the efforts of those who have attended.

Lou’s action, as seen in this light, are more justified. It is sad however, that maybe only now, when students are being threatened with the prospect of having their money spent without a say, will they have the time or energy to suddenly “participate” in dorm activities. Maybe this was a dramatic action, but something had to be done to arouse the
residents of Roosevelt Hall; to make them aware that if activities are going to be
successful, students must get involved and give a little of themselves. It is about time
that students stop expecting things to be handed to them on a silver platter.\textsuperscript{10}

Much as Salvie’s letter was directed at those not getting involved in the Hinman community,
Barad’s letter was directed at those who were not getting involved at the hall level. It appeared
as though at this time that student involvement in the realm of student government was slim to
none. The root cause of this apathy is unknown. However, the effects of this apathy were such
that is was being extremely detrimental to the well-being of not only the individual halls but the
whole of Hinman College. If HCC were to survive they would have to do something to make the
situation better and to get more students involved.

By early December it was time for elections, and descriptions of each position on the
HCC E-Board were given along, with some functions inherent in the position. The article states
that the President presides over all HCC meetings, appoints members to all-college committees
and represents the policies and actions of Hinman College. The Vice President for Academic
Affairs, besides assuming the duties of the President when the President is absent, serves as a
representative to Harpur College Council (the other HCC), and serves as chairman of the
Hinman College Academic Committee. The Vice President for Social Affairs chairs the Hinman
College Social Committee, and represents Hinman on all-university social committees. The
Secretary is responsible for recording and distributing the minutes of HCC meeting and for is
responsible for any other various forms of publicity or communication needed by HCC. The
treasurer, as the name may suggest, deals with the money of HCC. All of the financial
transactions and reports are kept accounted by the Treasurer. The Treasurer also chairs the
Financial Committee and submits a budget to HCC for approval, and if approved then submits
that budget to USG.\textsuperscript{11} Although the names would change slightly over the years (Secretary
would become Public Affairs Vice President and Treasurer would become Financial Vice President) and duties would evolve somewhat, these functions of each position would remain essentially unchanged till this very day.

In a showing of true Hinman spirit, Hinman alumni Mitch Karlick, who arranged for the *Hinman Halitosis* to be mailed to his home in Brooklyn, read about the apathy permeating HCC and the rest of Hinman College. Mitch wrote this letter to inspire the current students of Hinman and to reaffirm the unique nature of the spirit of Hinman:

My wife and I read with great enthusiasm about the recent HCRTHTF\(^1\) playoffs and the championship game. As you said in an article in the last issue of *Halitosis*, college spirit is alive and well and living in Hinman.

But both of us took offense at the statement accusing previous Hinman residents of being apathetic and scoffing at you. Since the inception of Hinman in 1968, the college councils had been striving for ways to have people identify with Hinman College and say “that’s the place to live on campus.” While there was apathy, an occasional idea did come into our heads. One of the first Hinman activities, for instance, was showing of cartoons and comedy shorts in the dining hall during Thursday dinner. Another thing was the creation of the Hinman dark room for photography buffs. Perhaps the biggest step towards a college identity came with the creation of the *Halitosis*. This weekly paper helped people get involved with the college. There are many other examples of activities that tried to spark college spirit. But the things that really did it were HCRTHTF and [Hinman] Follies. Finally, people are getting involved. Finally, people are realizing that they will get out of college life what they put into it.

The disease of apathy still abounds, though. We saw how no one wanted the job of Social VP. We heard how no one wants to work to get things done. Face it, people, if you don’t do it, no one’s going to do it for you!!

Now that I got all that off my chest, I’ll get to the actual reason for my letter. Why not hold a real homecoming weekend? I’m sure you could find out the whereabouts of former Hinman residents from the alumni office. And I’m also sure the response from alumni would be great. We folks are looking forward for an event like this as an excuse to come and visit. And with the parties, bridge tournaments, possibly tug of war, basketball and snow football games, it would really be a great weekend and another activity for Hinman to sponsor…\(^2\)

---

1 Hinman Co-Rec Two Hand Touch Football (HCRTHTF). More information on the development of Co-Rec football will be given in a later chapter.
Karlick’s letter is an important document in the history of HCC and in the early history of Hinman College. Over recent years there has been much discussion about how apathetic students nowadays are in comparison to their predecessors. The reality was that apathy was a big problem in 1967, at the beginnings of Hinman College, just as much as it is a problem now in 2007, forty years later. Some students then as now certainly didn’t care whether or not they live in Hinman College. But to those students it is just a place to live while you spend four years studying to get a degree. To people like Mitch Karlick and many, many others who came after him, Hinman was a place that was unique, that was special. Granted Hinman had its problems, especially in areas related to student disinterest and apathy, but there were many students who realized just how special Hinman was. Even at this early stage, the spirit of Hinman was taking shape and influencing numerous individuals to go above and beyond what average college students would do and to make their community a better place and in the process make them better people and more well-rounded citizens. There were many areas of Hinman that contributed to this unique Hinman spirit, but perhaps the strongest and most influential one, was HCC.

Unfortunately, apathy would not be defeated easily. The elections for HCC E-Board positions in December 1974 had unprecedented low voter turnout. Furthermore, only the position of Secretary had two candidates running for the position. The rest were unopposed. A very tongue-in-cheek article concerning the elections was written in Hinman Halitosis. In it, Stan Ruszkowski ran for an unprecedented year and a half in office and won with 283 votes. Ruszkowski attributed his win to the fact that his only opponent, “Write-in,” was placed beneath his name. “When questioned about student apathy, Ruszkowski replied, ‘Who cares!’”13 Paul Karlinsky won the position of Academic Vice President. Karlinksy attributed his victory to the
support he garnered from the Hinman Blacksmith Club. Their support, the article said sardonically, was the equivalent of having the Teamsters Union on your side. Mike Lamberta won the position of Social Vice President and planned many new and exciting Hinman social programs including a mystery trip to the Genesee beer plant, swimming and canoeing in Lake Lieberman, and a new sport he recently developed, Co-Rec Root-Ball. Jeff Morris won the position of Treasurer. His predecessor, Barbara Sprung, was studying abroad. In the race for HCC Secretary, Karen Kuhrt beat Debby Levbarg with 60% of the votes in the election’s only contested race. In an interesting twist, with the election of Kuhrt to the E-Board, Hinman now had a boyfriend-girlfriend pair serving on the HCC E-Board (Kuhrt and Ruszkowski were a well-known romantic item in Hinman at the time).  

With the elections over, HCC now turned to face the biggest problem facing Hinman at this time (and at virtually every other time in its long history): student apathy. In an editorial in the December 12 issue of *Hinman Halitosis*, the idea of paying students to get involved was virulently opposed.  

There was some disturbing discussion at the last meeting of the Hinman Council Monday night. The subject was the lack of student involvement in Hinman and the discussion was what to do about it. What prompted this was the fact that last weekend’s semi-formal was put together and taken apart almost singlehandedly [sic] by a few dedicated Hinmanites. The disturbing part was the suggestion that was tossed around to pay students to do the dirty work for Hinman functions, namely setting up and cleaning up.

Paying students is not a solution to the problem. It is a step in the wrong direction. The problem is how to get people involved. The prevailing attitude is one in which students sit back waiting for “Hinman College” to entertain them. As leaders of the college, the Council members must take steps to wake up fellow students to the fact that the invisible, intangible entity called “Hinman College” means all of us.

That is why paying students for ordinary volunteer services would set a dangerous precedent. It would only reaffirm the sense that “Hinman doesn’t need my help” if people were paid to organize our activities. And what incentive would there be for
volunteers on Council and its committees to continue their efforts as a service to Hinman?

When there’s work to be done in behalf of Hinman activities and no help to be found, it’s understandable for committee chairmen to feel discouraged and disgusted. The thing to do is review the situation. There are students more than willing to pitch in. A new approach is needed to tap this resource, to bring potentially interested students out of the woodwork. Some suggestions are floating around: More thoughtfully organized campaigns to recruit volunteers, and making the-morning-after cleanup squads more inviting as donuts-and-clean-up parties. These are steps in the right direction. They must be carried through and expanded upon. Only through continuous efforts along these lines will Hinman see a college run for the students by the students.\footnote{15}

This editorial unequivocally stated the position of many of those in Hinman. Students should not have to be bribed into doing something that they should be volunteering for in the first place. If Hinman residents needed to get paid before they lifted a finger to make their residential college a better place, then HCC and Hinman was in dire straits.

Not all was so gloomy. President Stan Ruszkowski wrote a letter in praise of all those who helped to make the semester an all-around positive one.

To the students of Hinman:

I would like to take this opportunity to say thanks to a few people who have put in a lot of time and effort in making the Fall semester a successful one for Hinman College. These people gave allot [sic] of themselves in what was often a thankless job, and they deserve personal recognition from every student in Hinman for a job well done.

The people I am talking about are those who have made up executive council of Hinman College: Barbara Sprung our Treasurer, Paul Karlinsky our Academic Vice President, Scot Salvie and Vinne Pantuso who have both served this year as our Social Vice President, and Barbara Shrager our Secretary. Without the efforts of these people Hinman would not have had as good a semester as we did. They all dedicated themselves to Hinman and tried their best to offer to Hinman as much as possible in order to make Hinman a better and more enjoyable place to live in. I cannot thank them enough for all their help this year. Unfortunately, neither Barbara, Scott, or Barbara [sic] will be on the executive committee in the Spring semester, as they all have different paths to follow or responsibilities to which they are obligated. I wish these three the best of luck in whatever they do and thank them again for all they did for Hinman College.

I would also like to thank all the people of the Hinman Council-the dorm presidents, dorm reps, the staff and Master Vito Sinisi for a job well done this semester. I hope that
this Spring the new executive committee and Hinman Council will be able to perform as well as their predecessors in making life in Hinman College a truly rewarding experience. Thank you all again for everything."16

Even though the semester was plagued by student disinterest and apathy, there were things that had gone well. The Semi-Formal, for instance, had been highly successful and was on its way to becoming one of the most popular and long-lasting of Hinman traditions. Not everyone in Hinman was grossly apathetic. Some students cared deeply about their college and worked hard to make it better. There was hope for the future after all.

In January of 1975, Stan Ruszkowski, like HCC Presidents before, printed an article in the Hinman Halitosis to inform Hinman residents about what the new year would offer.

To The Students of Hinman,

Hi, and welcome back to Hinman College. To those of you who are new to Hinman an especially warm welcome to what we feel is the most exciting of the residential colleges.

…The key to the success of a college is in the involvement of the students of the college. In order for this semester to be an enjoyable one for all the members of Hinman College it is important that all of us give a little of ourselves in helping out and getting involved in the various activities of the college. Believe me, no one will ever be refused when they offer to help out. Getting involved will not only make life in Hinman more enjoyable for everyone in the college but will also give you a great deal of personal satisfaction.

There are many activities planned for this semester, but we are still looking for any new and different ideas for the college that might make for a fun time for all of us. Included in the present plans are movies, dances, several Little Theater productions, a dinner club, a semi-formal dinner-dance, a Hinman Olympics, and Hinman Spring weekend featuring the Hinman Follies and assorted other goodies. It should be a lot of fun—and will be even more so if we get as much cooperation as possible from all the members of the college.

This is my last semester in Hinman and I want to be my best one yet. I’ve seen a lot of good things happen here, and this semester has the potential to be the most exciting and enjoyable one of all time. I’m going to try my best to make this happen and I hope everyone else will take the same attitude. If so we can’t miss…Here’s hoping for a successful semester to all. Thank you.17
Once again, the plea was for student involvement in Hinman and for pride in one’s residential college, something that had been lacking in the past. The hope of Ruszkowski and the rest of the HCC E-Board was to go out of this semester with a bang.

To what extent HCC accomplished their goals for that semester are unclear. However, when elections were held, Mike Smith was voted as the new HCC President and Jay Winter became the new Academic Vice President. In an unexpected twist of events, Mike Lamberta resigned as HCC Social Vice President. Mike joined the ranks of John Sutton, Vinne Pantuso and Scott Salvie who resigned from the demanding position of Social Vice President of HCC.\(^\text{18}\)

Running for the position were Mitch Jaffe and Susan Kozlowski. Mitch had the good fortune of being endorsed by popular and long-serving outgoing HCC President Stan Ruszkowski. However, due to reasons unknown, neither Jaffe nor Kozlowski would take the position and it would remain unfilled until the next semester.

In the fall of 1975, like his predecessors before him, Mike Smith, the new HCC President, wrote a letter to encourage more participation in Hinman. His letter read in part:

…For those of you who are new to Hinman, I would like to extend a special greeting and give you a little background on life in Hinman. Hinman has taken great pride in being the most innovative of the on-campus colleges. Activities that have sprung roots here include co-rec football and basketball, Hinman Little Theater, Follies, the semi-formal dance, supper club, and spiedies\(^2\) and beer parties. Hinman has also initiated several non-credit courses including bartending and automechanics, and credit courses such as Law and the Family, American Studies and a studio art course for non-majors.

Many activities are being planned but people are needed to help out in seeing these projects through…Last semester the amount of cooperation from students greatly increased in comparison to previous years and the trend continues. If everyone would just devote a little of his or her time and energy by participating on committees or serving at various Hinman functions, this year could be better than the last. All that it takes is a little bit of effort on everyone’s part…\(^\text{19}\)

Whether Smith’s call would be heeded was yet to be seen.

---

\(^2\) Spiedies are common in the Southern Tier of New York and particularly the greater Binghamton area. Spiedies are cubes of marinated chicken (or other meats) that are then grilled. Typically served between bread.
The position of Social Vice President was still to be filled and two individuals stepped up to run for the position. Sy Rolnick, one of the candidates running for the position, promised events such as mystery bus rides, costume parties, and an all-Hinman talent show. He also promised to be open to suggestions from his constituency. His opponent, John McDermott, promised to improve Supper Club and the Semi-Formal and obtain plenty of hit films for Hinmanites to view. McDermott stated in a letter to the Hinman community:

We are all tired of beer blasts, sock hops, greaser dances, and all of the other so-called parties that were thrown in the past. What we need is change! This is the seventies! Disco and romantic dancing are what’s happening. If am elected, dancing lessons of many styles will be given. Those who want to party will party!\(^{20}\)

The turnout for the special election was higher than in previous years. Sy Rolnick won the election, garnering 80% of the vote. Mitch Kasper, who ran unopposed for the Academic Vice President Position, won that seat. The HCC E-Board was now set and ready to tackle the problems facing Hinman College.\(^{21}\)

Unfortunately, when time came around for regular elections to be held, there was absolutely no interest in the positions of Treasurer and Secretary. Sy Rolnick had announced that he wanted to run for HCC President and that Doug Schain was running for Academic Vice President. It was so bad that Bob Giomi and Gabe Yankowitz announced (tongue-in-cheek) that they would be running for the Treasurer and Secretary positions, respectively. Bob Giomi said, “It’s a sad state of affairs when the staff has to run for these offices,” and Gabe Yankowitz reiterated that the situation was pathetic. Gabe also confirmed the rumors that he and Bob would do a fact-finding study on student life in the Bahamas with Bob appropriating the money and Gabe writing the full report.\(^{22}\) Luckily for both Bob and Gabe, they did not have to accept the offices they were “running” for. New students stood up and ran for the positions, albeit unopposed. The only contested election was for Treasurer and it was close, with winner John
Bansbach edged out his opponent Debbie Foster by only sixteen votes. Many complained about the lack of choice in candidates; however, it was consistently mentioned that no one else took an interest in running for office. 23

---

14 Ibid.