

The Capp Administration

In the Spring of 1990, HCC was going through some tough times. Membership in the student government organization was dwindling and student apathy, the monster that had been hounding HCC since its very inception, seemed poised to overtake the once mighty Hinman institution. Stepping into this picture was Jonathan Capp. Jonathan had been a resident of Hughes Hall his freshmen year (1988-1989) and then moved to Roosevelt Hall, where he lived for the next two years. Jonathan had always been interested in politics and wanted to get involved in student government in some capacity during his time in Hinman. He had won a seat as an SA representative for Hinman and was pleased at representing Hinman that way. However, by the Spring of 1990, HCC President Kris Mauter announced that she was stepping down from her position as President. HCC desperately needed a new President and Jonathan stepped up to fill that role.¹

Jonathan would go on to not only serve out Mauter's term of office, but ran himself and won a full term of office for the 1990-1991 academic year. Nearly twenty years later Jonathan would explain why he decided to enter into student politics:

I had an interest in politics, in meeting people, in encouraging other students to get involved in campus affairs, and to get more students to have a stake and take responsibility for the quality of life in the on-campus residential communities. Also, I was especially motivated to get more people involved in student government because I was constantly hearing how much everyone disliked "politics." People tend to associate politics (in a negative way) with government and public service without recognizing that "politics" is inherent in and a part of every interaction. I think some students came to that realization by participating in Council discussions (and letting their opinions be known!), and even came to enjoy the experience.²

Recognizing that HCC needed a boost, Jonathan set about to improve morale and to get people excited about HCC and what it could do for the community. One of the first orders of business was to revamp the HCC Constitution. The constitution had been amended in the past,

but what Jonathan and others like him saw was the need to make appeal to a more modern student body. For example, one amendment to the constitution updated and clarified the HCC E-Board positions and what their specific duties were. The position of Treasurer became Financial Vice President and the position of Secretary became Public Affairs Vice President. While some might claim that a simple name change would do little to improve HCC, the reality was that this was a first step in modernizing the organization and making more applicable to the current lives of students, as well as more in line with the world beyond student government.³

Jonathan also sought to encourage more participation from HCC members and regular Hinmanites in political issues affecting them outside the university. On August 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein, the dictator of Iraq, invaded neighboring Kuwait. This provocative military move forced many Western powers including the United States to come to the defense of neighboring ally Saudi Arabia and then to liberate Kuwait. During the build-up to Operation Desert Storm and during the actual operation itself, many groups organized protests both for and against the use of military force to diffuse the situation in the Persian Gulf. Jonathan encouraged Hinmanites to voice their opinions in campus publications including the *Hinman Halitosis*.⁴ This discussion on worldwide issues was not only beneficial for Hinmanites as US and world citizens, but it also got them interested in politics and the political process. Many Hinmanites became inspired to enter into government and politics as a profession and they came to realize that a good way to gain valuable experience in this area would be by participating in student government. And what better way to get involved in student government than HCC?

During his tenure as President of HCC, Jonathan saw HCC meetings grow by leaps and bounds. Many HCC meetings were jam packed with representatives and spectators alike, all eager to take part in how their residential college was governed. One of Jonathan's fondest

memories of his time in Hinman are HCC meetings where over seventy-five people attended. It was during those times that the energy in the rooms crackled as debates were waged and opinions were heard and the political process took its course. With this newfound energy and enthusiasm, HCC was beginning to not only come out of its long apathetic stupor, but now it even began to exceed some of the so called “glory days” of HCCs past. HCC was poised to do great things.

The biggest challenge Jonathan faced during his tenure as HCC President resulted from what can only be called the great blood drive scandal of 1991. The US Food and Drug Administration had issued a warning to blood collection agencies like the Red Cross not to collect blood donated by people of Sub-Saharan African descent. They issued this warning because of one of the biggest fears facing the medical community at that time: AIDS. Although much headway had been made to educate the public about AIDS and HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, many people were still fearful of the deadly disease. Unfortunately, then as now, AIDS was plaguing much of Sub-Saharan Africa, and the FDA believed that it was just too risky to take blood from this particular group. The only way to get around this was to have the blood collection agencies perform tests on the blood samples to screen for HIV. These tests were expensive and the Red Cross decided that it would be prohibitive to run the tests. In an effort to save money they decided to simply block Sub-Saharan peoples from donating blood. This essentially prohibited African Americans from donating blood.⁵

Not unexpectedly, this move roused the ire of many groups on campus who saw this policy as racist in the style of policies of the American South before the Civil Rights movement. Many protestors swarmed blood drive sites on campus to protest the action, posting up signs that said “Whites Only” and “Blacks Only” signs in clear reference to the old Jim Crow laws. In

many cases, demonstrators outnumbered those giving blood. This turned many away who would have given blood. Many on campus, even those who agreed with the protestors in principle, argued that these were the wrong tactics to take. Driving away blood donors only hurt those who desperately needed blood transfusions. The heated and angry protests continued until finally three students were arrested when they entered into the lines of donors and purposefully held up the lines by asking a large number of questions to the Red Cross workers. When these three students were arrested for what many saw as non-violent civil disobedience, many in the campus community went into an uproar, with many declaring that the Red Cross and blood drives in general should be banned from campus.⁶

HCC had traditionally sponsored a blood drive, but during this time many in HCC argued that they should not do so this year because of everything going on. Seeing this as an opportunity for discussion of issues concerning the blood drives and the positions of the FDA and Red Cross, Jonathan organized an HCC meeting that was predominantly focused on this issue. Students from all over campus, those both for and against the blood drives, came to that HCC meeting to give their views. The meeting that night was packed and heated debates occurred on whether or not HCC should sponsor a blood drive. Even though the meeting ran longer than usual, it inspired the passions of many of the participants. Even those that were usually quiet during the meetings felt the desire to put in their two cents. The issue was certainly divisive, but it got people thinking and acting, that was exactly what Jonathan wanted. That HCC meeting was so successful that other residential colleges followed suit and had their own discussions on the issue. Even the SA had an open forum concerning the blood drives.⁷

Although the issue of the blood drives was a divisive one and tempers flared during the debates, Jonathan had accomplished his goal. Hinmanites had their passions stirred and began to

participate more in HCC. They came to understand that student government was not just a useless, honorary position, but one that could work toward and enact meaningful change for the student body. By the end of the semester and the end of his term in office, Jonathan left HCC knowing that he had accomplished everything that he had set out to do. Whether he knew it or not, Jonathan had taken a sleepy organization and had revitalized it into an effective student government that was not only active and enthusiastic but also enacted lasting positive reform for its constituency. Like past HCC presidents such as Sy Rolnick and Eric Pomerantz, Jonathan was not afraid of taking on controversial issues, and by doing so he increased the political capital and standing of HCC. Although the late 1980's may have seen a general increase in student apathy across the board that had spilled out into the early 1990's, Jonathan's actions had reinvigorated HCC and set the stage for what it would do for the rest of the decade and into the new millennium. While other Hinman institutions began to see a decline during the 1990's, the stage was set for HCC to rise to new heights of unprecedented accomplishment.

Throughout the 1990's, HCC was considered the most active and influential student government on campus. The Spring of 1992 saw Hinman celebrate its Twenty-fifth Anniversary. Jessica Hogan and Jeff Horowitz were the Academic Vice President and the Financial Vice President, respectively, of HCC during this time. They, along with the rest of their E-Board helped oversee what was a grand celebration marking this milestone in Hinman College history. Together, the entire E-Board that year organized numerous parties to celebrate the occasion and during the actual ceremony commemorating Hinman's anniversary they dedicated a time capsule that is located somewhere in the Hinman Library that is to be opened on the Fiftieth Anniversary of Hinman College. The event also saw a large fireworks display to celebrate the anniversary. This was the first time that fireworks had been displayed over

campus. Today, fireworks are fairly commonplace, occurring during either opening weekend celebrations or Homecoming. However, Hinman College has the honor of organizing the very first fireworks display over campus.⁸

¹ Jonathan Capp, e-mail message to author, February 19, 2007.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ann Fenech, "Three students arrested at blood drive protest," *Pipe Dream* Vol. XL, No. 20, April 19, 1991.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jonathan Capp, e-mail message to author, February 19, 2007.

⁸ Jeff Horowitz, interview with author, November 13, 2006 and Jessica Hogan, e-mail message to author, February 12, 2007.