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## **The Impact of Liberalized Residence Hall Regulations**

As universities allow students greater freedom of choice, a larger percentage of students are choosing private rather than institutional living. Thus, many vacancies are occurring in university-owned housing, resulting in substantial revenue losses for the institutions. In an attempt to resolve this situation, college personnel workers must ask themselves the following questions: What factors should constitute the basis for residence hall reorganization? What are the appropriate rules and regulations for residence hall reorganization? What are the functions of student house government and the residence hall staff?

In examining student and staff evaluation of residence halls, Duvall found that students reported the role and function of the student house government and the counselor to be very important factors in the reorganization of residence hall regulations.<sup>1</sup> White and Ryder, in assessing the impact of "no hours" regulations for women, suggested that curfew rules were also significant.<sup>2</sup> These investigators found that the majority of upperclass students reported high satisfaction when nightly hour regulations were removed and freshmen women reported dissatisfaction when nightly hour regulations were *not* removed.

It appears from these and other studies that rules and regulations of the residence hall, house government, and the role of the residence hall staff are important elements in determining the psychological climate of residence halls and should be considered in any reorganizational program. The purpose of the present study is to assess the impact of new liberalized

regulations on the perceptions and behavior of student residents at a large residential university.

## **background for this study**

In the fall of 1966, changes in residence hall regulations and role definitions of residential staff were instituted as part of the new student life program at the University of Massachusetts. These changes resulted in a "no hours" system for upperclass women, optional signout sheets for all students, provisions for open house visitation, and provisions for residence halls to establish their own regulations concerning quiet hours. In addition, new policies were established which provided for the democratic election of house government, including a house judicial system in each residence hall. Furthermore, new role definitions of the residence hall directors and residence hall counselors were created. These new role concepts emphasized counseling and service functions rather than disciplinary functions in relating to students. In summary, the theoretical net effect of this new residential program was to place greater responsibility on the student residents for their own behavior and residential governance.

This present study was designed to assess:

1. the attitudes of the students concerning the establishment of house government;
2. the attitudes of the students concerning the redefined roles of the residence hall staff;
3. the attitudes of the students concerning the "no hours" curfew regulations for upperclass women and specified hourly curfew for freshmen women;
4. the impact of the new regulations on students' overall participation in residential activities and their reactions to the overall moral climate in the residence halls.

## **subjects and procedures**

A questionnaire of 83 items assessing students' reactions to the new residence hall regulations was sent by the student life office to the entire student body of approximately 10,000 students.<sup>3</sup> This questionnaire attempted to assess students' attitudes and changes in behavior as a direct result of the changes in residence hall regulations. Particular items of the questionnaire dealt with students' social, study, and sleeping habits, their participation in residence hall activities, and

their attitudes toward the residence hall staff and toward the university.

A total of 3,595 questionnaires was returned. The respondents were found to be representative of the entire body with respect to age, class, sex, type of residence hall, and college major. The questionnaires were tabulated and analysed in terms of percentages. For the purpose of this report, only specified topics of the questionnaire are considered.

## findings

The overall findings of the questionnaire indicated that students reported favorable changes in attitudes toward the new residence hall rules and regulations as well as increases in their participation in many areas of residence hall activities. Specific reported changes included:

1. increased participation in house government;
2. more favorable attitudes towards residence hall counselors and staff;
3. increased satisfaction with the "no hours" curfew regulations.

In response to a question concerning the effect of the establishment of house government upon the participation and involvement of students in residence hall, 37% of the males and 30% of the females reported that their own individual participation had increased (see Table I). With respect to the students' impressions regarding participation of others in residence hall activities, 57% of the males and 56% of the females reported that participation had increased markedly. Interestingly, the sophomore class reported the most increase in personal participation (41% males, and 36% females) and the senior class reported the lowest (20% males, and 16% females).

In summary, about one third of the students reported that their own participation had increased in residence hall activities and a majority of students reported that the participation of others in residence hall activities had increased. Male respondents reported a greater increase in residence hall activities than female respondents.

It was hoped that, as a result of the changes in regulations and role definitions of residence hall personnel, both counselors and heads of residence would be perceived by students as being more helpful, more service-oriented and less concerned

## Liberalized Residence Hall Regulations

**TABLE I**  
*Questions Pertaining to House Government*

Population	How do you think the new emphasis on house government has changed participation and involvement in dormitory policies and activities in your own dormitory or residence? With respect to yourself			
	Increased Participation		Decreased participation	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Total.....	37.03%	30.47%	2.83%	5.79%
Class 1970.....	36.52	30.84	1.45	2.85
1969.....	40.73	37.91	2.44	2.83
1968.....	37.87	26.65	2.99	8.88
1967.....	20.34	15.29	10.17	13.53
Population	With respect to others			
	Increased Participation		Decreased Participation	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Total.....	56.59%	55.89%	3.14%	5.86%
Class 1970.....	54.98	51.08	2.70	4.66
1969.....	58.29	60.70	3.66	6.33
1968.....	58.14	56.36	3.65	6.75
1967.....	49.17	55.36	2.50	5.95

with administrative and disciplinary matters. From the findings of this survey as reported in Table II, it appears that male counselors were felt to be more helpful during the current school year than they had been in previous years while there were no significant changes in the perceived behavior of the female counselors. Male counselors were asked for assistance more frequently during the current school year, whereas the female counselors were approached at about the same rate as in previous years. Directors of residence halls were approached with the same frequency during the year as the previous year but were perceived by both males and females as being more helpful now than in the past.

As a result of the new policies, it was hoped that student participation in the residence hall activities would increase. From the findings of this survey, it would appear that modest increases were made in all areas of participation in residence hall activities. For example, male students residing in the residential college residence halls reported the highest level of participation in cultural and/or academic events. In response to a question on student participation in open house

activities (defined as residence hall visitation privileges for students of the opposite sex), 77% of the males and 75% of the females indicated that they had participated during the current school year. Moreover, the majority of students reported a desire to increase the number of open house activities in the future. Only three percent of the students reported non-interest in open house activities.

With the proposed changes in residence hall rules and regulations, new curfew regulations were formulated for all women. Under this system, a "no hours" curfew was established for upperclass women and specified curfew regulations were formulated for freshmen women. The majority of the upperclass students indicated that they were very comfortable with this "no hours" curfew system (72% of the males and 80% of the females). Only 2% of the males and 1% of the females reported that the "no hours" curfew caused stress.

In response to a question concerning the students' perception of how helpful the specified freshman curfew was to freshmen women, 89% of the freshmen (men and women

TABLE II  
*Counselors*

How helpful did you think your Counselor was in his role as Counselor?									
Percentage responding "Helpful" or "Definitely Helpful"					Percentage responding "No Help at All"				
		Males		Females		Males		Females	
		Last Year	This Year	Last Year	This Year	Last Year	This Year	Last Year	This Year
Total		25.44	32.28	38.12	39.43	28.42	24.11	17.09	20.08
Class	1970		38.04		50.32		15.29		10.44
	1969	28.08	31.55	48.87	36.42	22.99	26.46	10.63	24.50
	1968	21.78	25.10	28.45	28.99	31.86	34.36	23.56	27.81
	1967	25.47	19.19	25.18	19.64	41.51	40.40	28.06	40.18
Percentage of students who sought help from their Counselor at least once									
		Males		Females					
		Last Year	This Year	Last Year	This Year				
Total			34.85	40.33	41.53	41.30			
Class	1970			53.82		53.99			
	1969		39.52	37.12	52.82	40.48			
	1968		32.02	27.48	31.71	29.16			
	1967		19.05	17.35	28.16	12.80			

combined) reported dissatisfaction. However, upperclass males reported that the curfew should be helpful to less than one half of the freshmen women; whereas, the upperclass women reported that the curfew should be helpful to the majority of the freshmen women. The uncomfortable attitude of freshmen women toward the specified curfew was reflected in their reported behavior patterns. In response to a question regarding curfew violations, 40% of the freshmen women stated they had violated the curfew. Interestingly, those violations tended to occur more frequently during the weekends than the week nights.

A further investigation of students' attitudes toward nightly curfew regulations indicated that students' behavior was not fully controlled by the existence of a curfew. Seventy-one percent of the males and 56% of the females reported that if a nightly curfew were enforced in residence halls, they intended to circumvent it by remaining away from their residence halls overnight. An investigation of the changes in students' dating behavior as a result of the curfew change showed that 29% of the upperclass males and 16% of the upperclass females reported an improvement in their social lives as a direct function of the "no hours" curfew. However, the remaining majority of students reported that their social lives were not affected. It appears that in spite of the greater freedom offered under these new regulations, upperclass women were still coming in about the same time on week nights as the previous year; and on weekends they reported coming in approximately one hour later.

Thus, it appears that the new "no hours" curfew resulted in some increases and/or changes within the social life for a small percentage of students. Although no dramatic changes, neither positive nor negative, were indicated, a majority of all upperclass students reported that they were comfortable and pleased with the "no hours" curfew regulations.

In response to a general question concerning the change in the moral climate on the campus, as a result of the new student life regulations, 70% of the students indicated no change. When queried on the subject of premarital pregnancies, the majority of the students stated they had no accurate information on this subject.

## discussion

In summary, it appears that the majority of the students

responded favorably toward the changes in residence hall policies. Most significantly, the changes concerning house government seemed to effect modest increases in student participation in residence hall activities. Moreover, many students responded favorably to the new role definitions of counselors and residence directors. From the findings of this study, it appears that students respond to counselors serving as facilitative rather than disciplinary agents.

The new "no hours" curfew regulations established for the upperclass women proved very satisfactory to them. Furthermore, their residential living and dating behavior did not change significantly as a result of the abolition of the upperclass women's curfew regulations. New curfews, regulating the behavior of freshman women, were met by dissatisfaction and open violation of the new rules. The obvious message from this is that, when contemplating changes in regulations governing student life and activities, college officials should consult with the students involved.

In summary, it can be concluded from the findings of this report that students do react to changes in residence hall regulations and that they react most favorably to changes which allow for more student participation and student governance.

## notes

1. W. Duvall, "Student-staff Evaluation of Residence Hall Environments," *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 1969, 10, (1), 52-58.
2. K. White, and N. Ryder, "Impact of a Selective Hours System for Women," *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 1970, 11, (4), 248-250.
3. The authors would like to thank Mona Morningstar, now at Stanford University, for her assistance in preparing the questionnaire.