

History of intervisitation reviewed

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Government Editor

(Editor's note: This is the first of a four-part series dealing with intervisitation at NMSU. This part concerns the history of intervisitation.)

When members of opposite sexes visit in a dormitory room it is called intervisitation.

The subject has remained an issue at NMSU for many years and now awaits a decision by the New Mexico Supreme Court.

Since the fall of 1970 the history of intervisitation at NMSU includes a trial program, polls, public meetings, a riot and a lawsuit.

In the fall of 1970 student requests brought about a trial intervisitation program.

Expressing a need for the program, Garcia Hall's Social Interaction Committee said, "The four-year period during college should not be cloistered. The students should be responsible and able to function well in society and communicate effectively. A well-designed intervisitation program would enable the student to develop social cognizance."

The trial system had restrictive hours and implemented a host or hostess system. Each student assumed responsibility for signing his or her guest in and out.

In February 1971 results from

the sign-in procedures showed an average of 464 signed guests each week.

On April 5, 1971, a memorandum from Dr. Philip S. Ambrose, then vice president for student affairs, to Anthony Valach, director of housing, denied student requests for expansion of the intervisitation program.

In a memorandum to the Inter-Hall Council, Ambrose said individual privacy was the "crucial issue" in the decision.

Other concerns Ambrose included were the university's responsibilities to the wishes of "parents, taxpayers, alumni, members of the legislature and the general public."

Ambrose also wrote, "Every policy and every procedure at NMSU, or at any other university, must be determined on the basis of whether or not such policy or procedure is educationally sound...It is now time for you to present your rationale to the university."

Student affairs presented the subject of intervisitation and the idea of its expansion to the NMSU Board of Regents meeting on May 14, 1971.

The official minutes show no discussion of the subject. Only the words, "Motion was made and seconded to allow no intervisitation whatsoever in the dormitories, effective today, May 14, 1971. Carried."

At the Dec. 8, 1971, regents meeting a proposal for intervisitation was made for a "detailed, highly limited, structured proposal for the establishment of a limited-hour allowance intervisitation program."

The regents voted to "study and research the intervisitation proposal."

As a result the regents sent a poll to parents of dorm residents. It gave parents a choice between seven-day-a-week visitation or no visitation at all.

With 53 per cent returned, the questionnaires indicated 58.12 per cent were opposed to the seven-day-a-week open visitation with 41.88 per cent in favor.

The housing department wrote a proposal based on the survey's results which would allow 42 per cent of dorm residents to participate in a visitation program.

The proposal was submitted to the regents in May 1972, but no action was taken.

That May the regents voted to make campus housing and meal plans voluntary for all students.

The previous policy, with certain exceptions, required all freshmen to live and eat on campus.

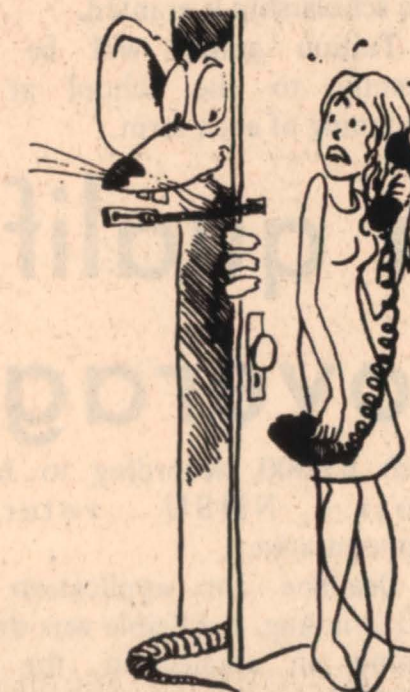
On Nov. 6, 1972, Valach provided Richard E. Pesqueira, vice president for student affairs, with a study of intermountain schools.

The study showed all 22 schools had a visitation program and at 18 schools all dormitory residents were in visitation areas. The remaining four schools had areas for students who did not wish to participate in intervisitation.

The problems of intervisitation reported in the study included security against unwanted participants, thefts and privacy, especially in the use of bath facilities.

Positive points were increased dormitory occupancy, effective enforcement of regulations by students, less noise, less damage, more constructive group activity and a trend toward a more responsible landlord-tenant relationship.

At the regents meeting of Nov. 10, 1972 it was decided to allow the NMSU administration a chance to present a proposal at the February 1973 meeting.



The administration proposal, Open House By Invitation (OHBI), allowed limited open houses in certain dormitory facilities for about 35 per cent of the dormitory capacity of 2,851.

The regents voted down the administration's OHBI proposal Feb. 10, 1972.

Violence erupted at NMSU early Thursday morning, Feb. 21, as university and Las Cruces police clashed with students protesting the rejection of the OHBI.

The confrontation, involving rock throwing and tear gas, continued sporadically through Thursday night and resulted in 39 arrests.

In March 1974 a class-action suit on behalf of all NMSU students was filed.

The suit contends the rules prohibiting intervisitation are "arbitrary, capricious, unreasonable, and bear no rational relationship to any education function."

It also alleges the constitutional right of freedom of association is violated by the intervisitation ruling.

There is no compelling state interest existing to justify the restraints on intervisitation and the regulations prohibiting visitation are too broad, the suit contends.

Though there were additional student attempts to bring the intervisitation issue before the regents, the board decided to await the outcome of the suit.

The case was dismissed in the District Court of Santa Fe County in the spring of 1973 for failure to state a claim upon which relief could be granted.

The case was appealed to the Supreme Court where briefs have been filed.

Currently, there is no intervisitation except for two to four open houses a semester.