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**“In Loco Parentis”: Student Life Policies at Taylor in the ‘70s and ‘80s**

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## **“In Loco Parentis”: Student Life Policies at Taylor in the ‘70s and ‘80s**

*In loco parentis* is one of the most fascinating topics within higher education. It is the concept of a college or university assuming parental responsibility for the student, which applies both inside the classroom and out. This is seen in the power and intricacies of academic policies, but also through residential living and behavioral expectations. Christian colleges often combine *in loco parentis* with community standards and student life policies, although these can vary depending on denomination, geographic location, demographics, and many other factors. Student life policies (including residential rules, behavioral standards, and community guidelines) have changed greatly within higher education in last several decades, but significantly for Taylor University during the ‘70s and ‘80s. This essay will explore what led to these changes, the impact they had on Taylor, and the landscape of higher education at the time.

### **Historical Context of Taylor**

The late ‘60s and early ‘70s brought a new factor of whole-person development to Taylor as an institution. Alongside the long-standing emphasis on spiritual and intellectual growth, Taylor introduced social and psychological development as crucial to the cultivation of an individual (Ringenberg, 1996). Taylor President Milo Rediger introduced new initiatives to bolster student development professionals’ rank and status and worked to represent and involve students in decision-making processes (Ringenberg, 1996). The combination of these changing atmospheres brought about new abilities for students to voice their concerns and to challenge the standards and expectations placed upon them. As American culture was undergoing dynamic shifts, Taylor students were investigating the role of these changes in their own community.

At a time in which controversial social issues were dividing both the nation and the church, Taylor remained refreshingly nonpolarized and resistant to false dichotomies. Dr. Jay

Kessler, who served as president from 1985-2000, was consistent in his desire for Taylor to refuse singular theological systems or simplistic views on social issues (Ringenberg, 1996). Throughout these changing times, Taylor developed thoughtful and intentional policies and guidelines for their community, culminating in the creation of the Life Together Covenant. This document, commonly known as the “LTC”, sought to place rules within the context of “mutual love, concern, and reconciliation” (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 222). The LTC and updated policies of the time, adopted by faculty and trustees in 1982, outlined a new way forward for Taylor students.

### **Student Life Policies**

Between the ‘70s and ‘80s, student life policies at Taylor changed dramatically. Students had strong feelings about behavioral expectations, residence life rules, and student life policies. They began to think critically about the purpose behind these policies and pushed back on them. Much of the student engagement on these issues has been documented in *The Echo*, which is the student newspaper. Additionally, the Ringenberg Archives and Special Collections has documents that provide insight into the changes and motivations behind these shifts. The main topics undergoing evaluation and eventual change were the student dress code, the ban on dancing, and open hours/opposite gender visitation as part of residential living policies.

#### **Dress Code**

According to a copy of the Student Handbook from the ‘80s, the dress code was intended to reflect the spirit of four biblical principles: “desire to glorify God in everything, responsibility to fellow Christians, consideration of others and sensitivity that we not offend in any way” (Haines, 1985). In the late ‘60s and early 70’s, the dress code was still formal. Women were instructed to wear dresses or skirts most of the year, which seemed to have been an unpopular

rule. A 1971 copy of *The Echo* published a statement from the vice president for student affairs, Charles Griffin, reminding students that the “slacks rule” had not changed. It reads, “Girls are allowed to wear slacks only in cold weather, from November to Easter” (Taylor University, 1971b). The fact that it was a public reminder implies that it was often disobeyed and was not easy to correct.

The dress code was a common topic in *The Echo* in the early ‘70s. In 1970 alone, there were over six articles written specifically protesting the existing dress code and proclaiming its inability to be enforced. Robert Whitehead, a Taylor student who later served as a United States foreign ambassador and consul-general, wrote one of these such articles. Whitehead wrote a scathing critique of the dress code, claiming that “the social well-being of Taylor does not rest on the fact that bare ankles are not to be found in the dining hall” (Taylor University, 1970, p. 2). He carries along in this vein, writing that academic excellence would not fall apart in the face of shorts (Taylor University, 1970). He concludes his article saying that the dress code should be abolished; he believed this termination would benefit all parties involved (Taylor University, 1970). Another student implored the dress code be changed to better represent the student body, citing the importance of personal expression and asking her peers to tolerate individuality (Taylor University, 1970).

These pleas were certainly heard by the administration. Just under a month after Charles Griffin’s “slacks rule” reminder, a “slacks proposal” was passed (Taylor University, 1971a). Effective October 3, 1971, slacks and culottes became part of acceptable campus attire (Taylor University). The three women’s residence halls had proposed this change, and it received a unanimous vote by the Student Life Committee (Taylor University, 1971a). Charles Griffin

himself invited feedback but reported minimal objections to the change (Taylor University, 1971a).

## **Dancing**

Like the dress code, Taylor's strict no-dancing policy was a topic of much debate in the '70s and '80s. Students took to *The Echo* to express their disdain or frustration with the current policies, which prohibited Taylor students engaging in the act of dance both on-campus and off. The Student Handbook at the time stated, "It is desirable to abstain from dancing... Violations are considered a breach of integrity" (Taylor University, 1977, p. 4). Tom Gross, a senior student in 1977, wrote about his love of dancing and the fact that King David himself danced before the Lord (Taylor University, 1977). Gross didn't suggest breaking this rule, but instead hoped to find a compromise through Taylor holding a square dance supervised through Student Affairs, "one that wouldn't let allow someone to become sexually aroused" (Taylor University, 1977, p. 4). The possibility of sexual arousal was one of the reasons given in the Handbook to ban dancing. However, Gross wittingly points out that "some people are aroused by mere talk" (Taylor University, 1977, p. 4). Another student, Candy Meyers, questioned the "fearful and evangelistic" tendency to "segregate art... by spiritual and secular", which she claimed leads to the denial of the redeemed person engaging in good and right self-expression (Taylor University, 1977, p. 4).

Despite student concerns, the Behavioral Standards Committee voted to maintain Taylor's current no-dancing policy in 1979. However, dissent and dissatisfaction continued within the student body. Taylor's Student Organization Senate surveyed the community in 1984, assessing their "feelings on square dancing" (Taylor University, 1984a, p. 2). Due to overwhelming support for dancing at Taylor from students, faculty, and staff, President Lehman,

his cabinet, and the Board of Trustees finally updated the policy to allow sanctioned folk dances, although it still prohibited social dancing (Taylor University, 1984b). In October, only a few months after the survey, Taylor hosted its first dance: a Western square dance hosted in the gymnasium with over 200 students in attendance (Taylor University, 1984b).

### **Open House and Residence Life**

Open house (also called open hours) policies were received with a mix of reactions from students. Unlike the dress code or the restriction on dancing, changes in open house policies were not instantly welcomed. Since Taylor's beginning, opposite-sex visitation had been prohibited. In the 1970s, the main lounges of halls were open throughout the day for opposite-sex interaction. In the Student Handbook pertaining to residence life policies, students were reminded that "Main lounges are used for relaxing, socializing and entertaining. PDA by couples, loud talking and sleeping are not in good taste" (Residence Life Policies). Eventually, "open houses" on the floor were allowed, although only two were permitted a month (Taylor University, 1974). *The Echo* published an editorial in 1974 that requested the limit to open houses be removed, stating that the "limit is... too restrictive in some cases" (Taylor University, 1974, p. 2). The article suggests that open house would hold many benefits for students: "Boy-girl relationships can be built on a casual basis; students can learn to initiate conversations with others they do not know... and open house can act as a catalyst for campus social activity" (Taylor University, 1974, p. 2).

Taylor then tried to implement a weekly open house but found numerous problems with this structure. A 1976 editorial claimed that "the policy received apathetic response from most students (couples excluded, of course)" (Taylor University, 1976, p. 2). Additionally, students accidentally walked in on each other, without clothes, to the embarrassment of all parties (Taylor

University, 1976). Because the open houses were not well attended, residence life student leaders stopped supervising the visitations (Taylor University, 1976). Open houses then moved to every other week, in hopes that they would be seen as a special social event (Taylor University, 1976). Even within the policy, there seems to have been room for confusion. Dr. Tim Herrmann, director of Residence Life at the time, clarified the state of doors and rooms during open house in 1983 (Herrmann). His letter to the student body states, “Any resident entertaining a guest of the opposite sex during open house must keep the room door open at least six inches and leave room lights on” (Herrmann, 1983).

Additional Residence Life policies enacted a sort of protection or safety measure over students. In the ‘70s, all side entrances to residence halls were locked at 11 PM. Main entrances were locked at 1 AM and unlocked again at 6 AM (Residence Life Policies). The expectation was that students would remain in their building during these hours. This relates back to the idea of *in loco parentis*, which allowed Taylor to act as a parental guide and safeguard for the student.

### **Impact of Policy Changes at Taylor**

Taylor has changed noticeably in policy but minimally in culture since the ‘70s and ‘80s. Open house hours are now hosted every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and students wear whatever they want to class, chapel, and the dining hall. Occasional dances are hosted on campus, like Dr. Michael Lindsay’s Inaugural Ball or TSO’s Winter Formal. There is no longer a curfew or rules about leaving campus whenever you want. Yet, comparing the number of changes that occurred in less than a decade during that time, the fact that these policies are only marginally different almost 40 years later is surprising. Additionally, many of the same attitudes towards opposite-sex interaction, appearance, or lifestyle are left unchanged.

The policy changes of the '70s and '80s were reflective of a wider shift within Taylor's student development department (T. Herrmann, personal communication, December 2, 2021). Dr. Chip Jagers, the Vice President of Student Life and Dean of Students, had spearheaded a move towards more intentional community and an internal identity for Taylor's student body (C. Jagers, personal communication, December 2, 2021). Jagers, who began his vice presidential role in 1979, pushed for Taylor to move away from purely cultural behavioral standards and embrace Biblical guidelines of community engagement (C. Jagers, personal communication, December 2, 2021). In fact, it was Jagers' influence that led to the Life Together Covenant (C. Jagers, personal communication, December 2, 2021). In an interview, Jagers stated that his desire was to implement Milo Rediger's philosophy of whole personal development and the integration of faith and academics throughout student development, especially in the residence halls (C. Jagers, personal communication, December 2, 2021). Additionally, Jagers stated that the prior policies, called "behavioral standards", included policies that were both cultural and biblical, "some dos and some don'ts", which was confusing and inconsistent (C. Jagers, personal communication, December 2, 2021). The changes in cultural policies (like dress code, open house, and dancing) opened the door for Taylor to focus more on the blessings and covenants of Christian community and commitment.

### **Context in terms of broader higher education at that time**

Christian higher education was significantly slower than its secular counterparts in adapting outdated student life policies. While students at state schools might have been protesting bans on marijuana or same-sex relationships, Christian students were requesting looser dress codes and the ability to square dance. As culture moved further from Biblical standards, higher education professionals fought to keep their schools and dorms countercultural, pure, and

on the “straight and narrow”. The idea of *in loco parentis* that was breaking down in secular higher education was still widely embraced within Christian institutions. However, the ‘70s and ‘80s was a time marked by self-exploration, revolution, and activism for students everywhere, whether focused more externally on culture or internally to a school’s own policies.

The ‘70s and ‘80s was the beginning of the peak of Christian higher education. The spirit of American evangelicalism was contagious, and as the church gained ground, so did Christian colleges. The rise of evangelicalism combined with easy, affordable access to college through the Higher Education Act of 1965 caused schools like Taylor to be in high demand (Ringenberg, 1996). The depth and effort of enrollment and sales strategies used by Christian schools to bring in students today would have seemed confusing to institutions in the ‘70s and ‘80s. In the late ‘80s, the President’s planning council recommended an enrollment cap since Taylor could no longer house all the students who were applying (Ringenberg, 1996). As the decade closed, a new residence hall and additional campus-owned apartments accommodated for the increase in registration.

In addition to bringing in more and more revenue in the latter half of the 1900s, Christians schools were relatively stable in terms of the student body’s engagement with national and institutional politics. The social justice movements and activist upheavals that swept secular schools in the ’70s hardly touched Christian institutions. Ringenberg accredits this to the strict model of Christian student life, as well as the fact that most of the students came from conservative, Protestant families unphased by the Vietnam war, the plight of the impoverished, or the other social issues of the time (2006). However, those who did protest or campaign for justice received significantly more personal attention and care than their secular peers (Ringenberg, 2006). Because Christian faculty devoted great amounts of time and energy to

guiding their students, students “acquired fewer of the emotional reactions that develop from a sense of neglect” (Ringenberg, 2006). Additionally, student activism in regards to policies at Taylor *did* lead to change. Instead of being ignored or repressed, students’ suggestions and concerns were met by the administration with a desire to offer understanding and support.

### **Conclusion**

Taylor University was greatly impacted by the changes in student life policies in the late 1900s. Not only did these changes pave the way for Taylor’s shift towards a Biblical covenant as opposed to behavioral expectations, but they also symbolized a greater move away from *in loco parentis* for Christian colleges and universities. This illustrates the ways in which Christian higher education professionals began to offer more responsibility and trust to their students. However, Christian higher education still operates on a narrow ledge between two parts of the customer: the student and the parent. Because Christian colleges serve both parties, guidelines must uphold religious standards while setting the framework for a community of safety and trust for all involved.

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